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JOURNEYS: PERSONAL MORPHOGENESIS;

A study of the interplay between structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors affecting mature students' decisions to undertake an Open Access course for possible entry to university.

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For the qualification of:- DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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## SUMMARY

THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Summary of thesis submitted by John David Alford for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Sociology entitled:-

Journeys: Personal Morphogenesis; A study of the interplay between structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors affecting mature students' decisions to undertake an Open Access Course for possible entry to university.

Date of submission: September 1995

The thesis looks at the morphogenesis of structure, culture and agency and the historical interplay between them. It attempts to do this by investigating the lives of mature students applying for a place on an Open Access course as a foundation year for university entrance. The focus of the study concerns the reasons given by the students for their application to undertake Access and seeks to discover whether their decision to enrol on Access can be interpreted morphogenetically as representing a 'new beginning' in their lives; a 'new beginning' which in turn represents the end of a personal and culturally related morphogenetic cycle. It is the contention of the thesis that the socio-cultural background of the students is not one that is usually seen as culturally compatible with university entrance and thus their application represents not only a major event in their personal lives but also a significant cultural movement from one cultural base to another. Since Access courses represent a major educational initiative the students' decision to join the course can be read as a morphogenetic interplay of structural, cultural and biographical factors. Research material was gathered through a morphogenetic analysis of the students' Access application forms, course interviews, informal discussions, written statements whilst on the course and a series of in-depth interviews. The thesis concludes that from the evidence of their own life histories the students were experiencing a personal morphogenesis related to change in their lives and that their biographical 'journeys' need to be read in relation to the changing wider structural, cultural and familial backdrop against which their own morphogenesis is occurring.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>SUMMARY</b>	2
<hr/>	
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	9
<hr/>	
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	10
<hr/>	
Vehicles for Passengers; Passengers for Vehicles	10
The choice of Open Access students as research passengers; culturally influenced decisions.	11
The choice of Open Access students as research passengers; culturally important decisions.	16
The Morphogenetic Perspective	19
Variations on Cultural Themes	22
Patterned Journeys	24
A Morphogenetic Methodology; 'storylines'	29
 <b>CHAPTER ONE: MORPHOGENETIC CYCLES: HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY</b>	 41
<hr/>	
Introduction	41
Chronological and Aeonic Temporality	43
Access Applications and Interaction; Cultural and Structural Morphogenesis	44
Biographical Journeys; Personal Morphogenesis	52
Personal Morphogenesis; Laing's concept of life journeys.	58
Cultural Kaleidoscopes	64
Access Students and Biographical Change	66
 <b>CHAPTER TWO: STRUCTURE AND AGENCY INTERPLAY</b>	 85
<hr/>	
Teenage Martian Werewolves, Sammy Davis Jnr. and Sarahs Various	85
Butterflies, Jars and Perspective Transformations	88



Remedies, Good Intentions, Insurmountable Structures	94
Structural Conditioning; Cultural Reaction	98
Structural Adjustments and Commitments; Becker's conditions for personal change.	99
Other Literature; Lack of Sociological Analysis, lack of morphogenesis.	102
Non-participant Groups in Post-school Education	107
Life Transition Theories	113
<b>CHAPTER THREE: EDUCATION PROFILES (BEGINNINGS)</b>	<b>123</b>
Introduction: Apathy and Acceptance, Resistance and Rebellion.	123
Delayed Cultural Reaction Amongst Working Class People	124
Reflections on Teaching, Curriculum and Examinations	126
Cultural Contradictions; Parents and Pupils	137
Structural, Cultural, Familial and Biographical Factors	152
Changing Cultural Course; Flying Out of Formation	156
Strength of feeling	159
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: WORK PROFILES (MIDDLES)</b>	<b>162</b>
Introduction	162
Negative Work Experiences	165
Wheels Within Wheels, Cycles Within Cycles, Stories Within Stories	165
Positive Work Experiences	181
Reasons for Leaving Work	189
The Stuff of Dreams	201
Cultural 'Realism' and Cultural 'Pragmatism'	204
Conclusions	205
Cultural Meaning	207

Cultural Change	209
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: PERSONAL PROFILES (ENDINGS)</b>	<b>217</b>
Introduction; A change is as Good as a Rest	217
Monastic Retreats; A Rest is as Good as a Change	218
Anticipated Life Changes	223
Non-anticipated Life Changes (crises).	237
Conclusions	254
Apathy, Alienation and Activation	263
<b>CHAPTER SIX: NEW BEGINNINGS</b>	<b>267</b>
Introduction	267
New Beginnings	270
Wanting to Work with People in the Future	276
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: AFFINITIES:THE PUSH AND PULL OF IDEAS</b>	<b>288</b>
Introduction: Ticking Over Nicely, Ticking Over Culturally	288
Change and Interpretation of Change	289
Delayed Personal Change; Delayed Personal Crisis	293
Moments	320
<b>CONCLUSIONS: CULTURAL PATTERNS AND BIOGRAPHICAL MAPS</b>	<b>325</b>
Cultural Morphogenesis; Change Begets Change	325
Access Students as 'Ideal Types' or 'Extreme Types'	329
Changing Cultural Scope; Cumulative Cultural Entities	335
Individuals fighting back	342
Personal Morphogenesis; final facts, final tracks	343
Cumulative Cultural Handicaps and Considerable Decisions	346

Change and Crisis; Emerging Patterns	347
'Crisis'; non-anticipated change	348
The 'People Factor'	349
Main Patterns	350
Tabular Correlations	350
Permutations and Interpretation	359
Opportunity Costs and Personal Anomie; the Balance Factor	364
Confidence Levels; Evidence of the Balance Factor	368
Further Research Agenda	369
'It's a Wonderful Life'	383
Morphogenetic Journeys	385
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>387</b>

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### LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:	All Students: Gender and Ethnicity By Age.	67
Table 2:	All Students: Educational Qualifications.	74
Table 3:	All Students: Employment History.	78
Table 4:	Social class of admissions to degree through PCAS	80
Table 5:	Reflections on teaching, curriculum and examinations: total number of responses.	126
Table 6:	Reflections on teaching.	127
Table 7:	Reflections on curriculum.	129
Table 8:	Reflections on examinations.	132
Table 9:	Cultural attitudes: parents and pupils: total number of responses.	138
Table 10:	Not taking school seriously.	146
Table 11:	Regret not taking school seriously.	149
Table 12:	Boredom and Not achieving true potential: total number of responses.	165
Table 13:	Boredom at work.	167
Table 14:	Not achieving true potential.	173
Table 15:	Working with people and Job satisfaction derived: total number of responses	181
Table 16:	Working with people.	182
Table 17:	Job satisfaction derived.	187
Table 18:	Redundancy, Birth of a Child: total number of responses.	189
Table 19:	Redundancy.	190
Table 20:	Birth of a child.	194
Table 21:	Reasons for Leaving Work: Anticipated Change Category.	211
Table 22:	Reasons for Leaving Work: Non-anticipated change (crisis) Category.	212

Table 23: Reasons for Leaving Work: Anticipated and Non-anticipated change (crisis) categories.	213
Table 24: Anticipated life changes; total number of responses, all categories.	223
Table 25: Children started/settled at school.	223
Table 26: Children left school.	229
Table 27: Children left home.	231
Table 28: Non-anticipated life changes: (crises); total number of responses, all categories.	237
Table 29: Broken relationship.	237
Table 30: Redundancy/Unemployment.	244
Table 31: Illness.	251
Table 32: Categories of anticipated and non-anticipated life changes.	255
Table 33: Anticipated life changes (all factors).	255
Table 34: Cumulative totals of anticipated life change categories.	256
Table 35: Non-anticipated life changes (crises).	257
Table 36: Cumulative totals of non-anticipated life changes (crises) categories.	258
Table 37: Anticipated and non-anticipated life changes (crises).	259
Table 38: Cumulative totals for anticipated and non-anticipated life changes (crises).	260
Table 39: Students with more than one response in change or crisis categories.	261
Table 40: Change of direction/new life/chapter/adventure/crossroads.	270
Table 41: Wanting to work with people in the future.	276
Table 42: Matrix showing all students with all categories	353
Table 43: Crisis and change combinations.	361
Table 44: Students in categories 'Working with people and 'Wanting to work with people in the future'.	363

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Vehicles for Passengers; Passengers for Vehicles**

The thesis concerns social structure and human agency and the historical relationship between the two. The vehicle for investigation is an in-depth study of an Open Access Course for mature students at a college of further education in the Midlands. The title of the thesis, 'Journeys: Personal Morphogenesis; A study of the interplay between structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors affecting mature students ' decisions to undertake an Open Access course for possible entry to university', like Durkheim's famous study, 'Suicide: A Study in Sociology', places emphasis on the 'Study in Sociology' rather than the substantive content of the study, the vehicle for the study, 'Suicide'.

Similarly, the core of the thesis is 'the interplay between structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors' affecting people's decision-making and ultimately, their lives. The use of an Open Access Course is the vehicle for demonstration of the relationships in the manner that Durkheim used suicide. Thus just as Durkheim's study could have read, 'Family Life: A Study in Sociology', or 'Education: A Study in Sociology', etc., etc., then the thesis could have read, 'Journeys: .... affecting people's decisions to open a video shop', or 'Journeys: .... affecting car assembly line production workers' decisions to volunteer for redundancy', or

Journeys: .... affecting people's decisions to change religious church, denomination or sect affiliation'.

The vehicle, although important in its own right, is in essence of secondary importance to the theoretical and methodological issues it carries. To be more accurate, one should really reverse Durkheim's original analogy, so that the vehicle becomes the passengers and the passengers, the vehicle. Thus, 'Suicide' rather than being used to 'carry' 'The Rules of Sociological Method' was in fact, being carried, being used, by the latter, as an explanatory passenger for them. Similarly, the true vehicle of the thesis, is 'the interplay between structural, cultural, familial, and biographical factors', affecting people's decision-making. The people aboard this particular vehicle on this particular journey were one hundred and seventeen 'mature students' wanting to 'undertake an Open Access course for possible entry to university', to compliment and sustain the hypothesis and its theoretical and methodological underpinnings.

**The choice of Open Access students as research passengers; culturally influenced decisions.**

In their study of Education and the Working Class Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden maintain that:

The very choice of any research project in sociology inevitably presumes an act of judgement in which personal values and personal history play their own - perhaps deep-hidden role. The true science lies in recognizing this, not in avoiding the terrain where involvement is most perceptible. [Jackson and Marsden, 1972: 17.]



They continue ...

In this report we are deliberately mapping out a stretch of life, an initiatory experience, through which we lived ourselves. And with this survey we took our bearings.

Hence the method. we gathered a sample of ninety working-class children. Two of the names on that sample are Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden. In this report we track the fortunes of the other eighty-eight - the ones we saw. But the reader, standing further back than we ever can, perceives the full ninety. [Jackson and Marsden, 1972: 16-17.]

Likewise, 'Journeys' is a study of one hundred and seventeen mature working class students seeking an alternative route to university, and one person who has already followed it. One of the names on the list of students is John Alford. The study looks at the fortunes of the other one hundred and seventeen - the people I saw. 'But the reader, standing further back than I ever can, perceives the full' one hundred and eighteen.

Jackson and Marsden again ...

We jumped in at the deep end, tried to be methodical, tried to be honest, and tried to leave the reader free to develop the evidence. [Jackson and Marsden, 1972: 17.]

Hopefully, I have tried to be methodical and in doing also laid out my subjective stall rather than trying to conceal my **agency-structure baggage** which I cannot help but carry. I have tried 'to be honest' and 'leave the reader free to develop the evidence'. If there are any biased slips showing I have tried to reveal them and come clean in line with Myrdal's insistence that, 'A disinterested social science never existed and for logical reasons can never exist', and therefore the researcher should, 'Expose the valuations to full light, make them

conscious, specific and explicit, and permit them to determine the theoretical research'. [Myrdal, 1970: 55.] The point being that, ontology, epistemology, methodology and research methods are inseparable, not only in their scientific linkage, but also and more so in their relationship to the social researcher as conditioned by his/her social and life situation. How they explain society working or not working, how they theoretically make sense of people's lives, must be a reflection of how they make sense of their own lives.

All people have their own way of understanding their own lives, their perspective on events, their societal view. Sociologists by nature of calling themselves sociologists **have something more, not something else.** The something more is their 'scientific' investigation, which sets them apart from the commonsense view of the non-sociologist, the people. Nevertheless, commonsense views are part and parcel of the daily experience of living and of living in a given society, and must reflect the structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors of a person's time and place, be they sociologist or non-sociologist. It would be impossible for a sociologist to proclaim himself or herself to be just sociologist and in no wise a non-sociologist. **Hence part of the reason for Durkheim's study of suicide was attributable to the death of a close friend.**

Weber acknowledged that the very 'choice' of research topic/area must by definition have some subjective basis, but even before that, the 'choice' of why one became a sociologist, rather than say, a psychologist, a chemist, a mathematician, a plumber, or an electrician, must reflect the person's structural, cultural, familial and biographical time and place, and the interplay between them; all roads lead back to Rome, or in this case the core of the thesis, 'structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors affecting a person's decision-making', to become a sociologist for instance, and to undertake a thesis.

The word choice was emphasised since we all are to some degree, enclosed within the cultural circumstances of our societal birth which will influence greatly our life journey and experience of the social road we travel. Thus, prior to embarking on a new journey, a new road, via an Open Access Course and to University, I was a working class office worker, and the occupational list of my cultural acquaintances, included, as you would expect, mostly office workers, factory workers, largely reflecting my cultural grouping, i.e. working class. After some ten years in the middle class world of academia my occupational list of acquaintances includes (as well as the former list), psychologists, sociologists, mathematicians etc.

Thus, my experience has been a 'cross-cultural' encountering of

both working class and middle class worlds. Thus, whatever is written within the theoretical and methodological confines of this thesis must by definition reflect in part that 'cross-cultural' experience, my divided experiential non-sociologist ontology, which by definition must also reflect to some degree in 'my sociologist's' academic ontology, and in both cases influence the changing epistemology of my changing and divided world.

Hence part of the reason for my study of mature students on an Open Access Course is attributable to the 'fact' that I was once a mature student on an Open Access Course. The emphasis is clearly meant to draw an analogy with part of the reason for Durkheim's choice of research area, the suicide of his friend, but subjectivity is not the whole story for, Durkheim's main focus on suicide was because sociologically he saw it as 'the toughest nut to crack;' taking one's own life is the most personal decision we can take. A working class person making a decision to go to university is making an important decision; it may not be so drastic as taking one's own life but in terms of cultural change it certainly means shedding the old life and opting for a new one.

Thus, having acknowledged the crucial nature of subjective influences on the social researcher in their choice of social research area, we must also acknowledge that the choice of research areas are not solely subjective, anymore than they are

solely objective. Decision-making can be a multi-faceted exercise, as with the researcher's decision to study this area or that area, as with Durkheim's decision to study suicide, due in part to the death of his friend, due in part to the importance of the act (as a test for the positivistic science of society). Thus, my own decision to study Access, is due in part to my experience as an Access student and from a morphogenetic perspective, to investigate the importance of the decision of working class people to join Access for possible entry to university; for culturally speaking they are going against their cultural vein as mature working class people.

**The choice of Open Access students as research passengers; culturally important decisions.**

The older we become, the longer we live in that place called society, the more we are exposed to the structural/cultural properties and their interconnections, the more we become a carrier of our own structural/cultural properties; before you take your part in the play you have to go to drama school, you have to learn your lines. Thus, in the earliest years, as they progress, the more middle class we become, the more working class we became, the more woman we become, the more man we become, the more Catholic we become, the more Protestant we become. It takes time to learn the lines, to understand the script, to become culturally typecast. Thus, it would be very difficult for a one month old baby to be defined as a devout Catholic, or a real boy or girl, or to distinguish its baby noises as either an elaborated or restricted code.

At the point of birth none of the one hundred and seventeen Access students that are the 'agents' in this study, made a choice as to being born, were not consulted about their gender preference, their social class allocation, their religion, their ethnicity and so on and so forth. Although, as was stated earlier in the discussion, the older we become, the longer we live in that place called society, the more we are exposed to the structural/cultural properties and their interconnectedness, the more we become a carrier of our own structural/cultural properties', but the possibilities for becoming less of each also increase.

If all went well and the 'system of living' was able to fulfil what life should systematically be like for each, based on the conditioning of their birth culture, then indeed the equilibrium would be maintained in something approaching an ant like consensus. Human history proves to be the opposite since life is not like that, since society is not like that, since people are not like that.

The conscious experience of advantaged or disadvantaged cultural positions in a structural framework will set the momentum for change, people may either reflect upon or react against, or more often a little of each, their cultural position. As ever, this position is not a chosen one but one developed after exposure to the fairness or unfairness of it all after leaving the womb. The Access students, by their

cultural position as working class (as will be argued), can be seen to fall into the former of those two categories. That they have applied to Access, due (as will argued) to personal changes and/or crises in their lives, needs to be understood in relation to the changing structural properties that made Access available in the first place; plus the 'elective affinity' between these particular people and those particular educational provisions.

Open Access Courses, for mature students, a Government initiative in 1979, need to be understood as a further chapter of the continuing story, the morphogenesis, of state education. However, unlike compulsory education for children, Open Access courses are provided on a voluntary basis for mature students, and since most mature people do not undertake them, the thesis is looking at those who do, whilst acknowledging that the cultural minority can only be understood in relation to the cultural majority from where they came.

Government voluntary educational initiatives, may target certain social groups, for instance the unemployed, ethnic minorities, women, but the people who voluntarily arrive on such educational programmes, may have a far more complex tale to tell, than being a member of a disadvantaged collectivity, as important as that may be. Indeed, the intended consequences of Government or other formalised structured initiatives designed for certain social groups, may not always be taken up and

utilised in the manner expected, unintended consequences may be an emergent property of such structure/agency interaction. The purpose of Sunday School may well have been to teach working class children to read the Bible for ulterior motives, preservation of the status quo of the privileged, but the unintended consequences of that action meant that a literate person may read other literature, not least radical pamphlets calling for the overthrow of that very same status quo.

### **The Morphogenetic Perspective**

People are neither social clones, jumping to the structural tune of Government or others, nor are they free social spirits, untouched by their structural/cultural environment. The truth lies somewhere in the interaction between the two reflecting and reflected in the interaction of the two within the changing structural and cultural properties of society - for whose change they are partly responsible and through whose change they become changed themselves. Social Morphogenesis is always accompanied by the double morphogenesis of agents. As Archer states:-

In the preceding two chapters, discussion of the morphogenesis of structure and culture relied upon social agents and their interaction as the mechanism which explained structural and cultural stability or change. Thus, the focus was on the results of interaction, which are passed up to the Structural and Cultural systems and passed on to subsequent generations of people as new conditioning influences upon them ... Although it is perfectly legitimate to focus upon the remodelling of structure and culture in this way, it is equally important to recognise that the self-same sequence by which agency brings about social transformation and cultural is simultaneously responsible for the systematic transforming of social agency itself. [Archer, 1995: 247.]



By definition, morphogenesis suggests change, structural, cultural and agential movement through a process of a socially conditioned starting point, a socio-cultural interactive discourse leading to an elaboration of the original social conditioning. The concept of time is thus the cornerstone of the morphogenetic approach by seeking to identify cyclical movement through the aforementioned process of conditioning, interaction and elaboration, setting the scene for a new morphogenetic cycle. Thus time is used to separate and thereby link structure and agency through an understanding of their morphogenetic properties, hence the stress placed on analytical dualism by the morphogenesisists.

What is crucial then is that the morphogenetic perspective maintains that structure and agency operate over different time periods - an assertion which is based on its two simple propositions that: that structure necessarily predates the actions which transform it; and that structural elaboration necessarily post-dates those actions. [Archer, 1995: 89-90.]

By notion of such temporal sequencing morphogenesis suggests a story line of sorts, a story line that can be read structurally, culturally and biographically, ever aware of the interplay between the three. Structural/cultural conditioning is by no means a static social state and is the prelude for socio-cultural interaction, the main body of the story line, where beginnings are changed and ends generated. Similarly, people's lives are subject to the same movement, from whence we start is not always where we finish. By the same criterion our finish is not always our end, but may well lay the foundations

for a further morphogenesis, a further story/chapter on the journeys we travel. The main contention of the thesis is that such a journey can be seen as a personal morphogenesis of individuals, a biographical movement, related to wider structural and cultural factors, themselves subject to structural and/or cultural morphogenetic change.

The advantageous or disadvantageous positions people are born into will not determine their human existence but will place constraints on what they are able to do about it. The cultural collectivities into which the individual is involuntarily subscribed at birth will foster a certain life style, a certain way of thinking, a certain cultural path. Any digression from our birth culture, from our cultural path, will not be an untrammelled choice but one requiring consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of change, in short weighing up the opportunity costs involved in cultural digression. Should one want to change one's cultural course, (and such a decision depends on how one has experienced the journey), then due to the cultural legacy at birth, choices, decisions and ultimately actions, are restricted in cultural proportion to one's cultural position. Thus, the more disadvantaged one's starting point the more problematic it is to instigate personal change of position should one desire to do so anyway. For instance a working class person without a university degree, desiring to enter university would have to consider a whole range of important issues prior to making a firm decision to undertake

the degree, including family situation, marital position, work situation, finances and not least one's confidence in one's ability to be able to cope with the academic work due to linguistic-cultural differences between the social classes.

Certain opportunities and information are open to the privileged and closed to the non-privileged. Options are not determined but the opportunity costs of attaining them are stacked very differently for the two. Such differential costings constitute good reasons for initially opting for different sections of the total role array. Initial choice of position is corrigible but big corrections entail increased costs which are further reasons why not very many will undertake drastic remedial measures (why, for example, so few black, female, Asian home-workers ever find their way to university)

These initial interests with which Agents are endowed, through their life chances, provide the leverage upon which reasons (otherwise known as constraints and enablements) for different courses of action operate. They do not determine the particular Social Actor an individual chooses to become, but they strongly condition what type of Social Actor the vast majority can and do become. [Archer, 1995: 277-278.]

### **Variations on cultural themes**

The question then, when people from disadvantaged cultural groups experience states of life change 'anticipated' or 'non-anticipated' (crisis) and it triggers off the search for journeys new, where do they go? What new horizons are culturally accessible to them or denied them? A working class person reaching such a point of personal change and opting for a university education as a new biographical path, something culturally denied them, both in availability and desirability, (Access Courses now providing extended though still limited availability for working class people) is making an important

personal decision regarding their future by taking a significant digression from their cultural base. They could have chosen to continue on their cultural path with limited personal change within their own cultural milieux, a new job for instance, a move of house, a move of city. By the same criterion, a middle class person changing job, house or city is staying within their own cultural milieux. The key issue for the thesis is that from either a working class or a middle class perspective a change of job, house or city can be seen as **respective variations on a cultural theme**, whereas a working class person desiring and deciding to enter university is breaking cultural ranks from the vast majority of their working class counterparts, something akin to a middle class person deciding to leave a professional career to become a checkout assistant at the local supermarket.

The cultural denial of a university degree for working class people as part of their traditional educational experience ironically provides them with alternative life route as a mature student, a new cultural journey, when, dependent on other life changes/crises (as will be argued), they desire even more significant change and against all the cultural odds opt for university; to quote an old working class saying, 'in for a penny in for a pound'.

The decision may involve much consideration of the opportunity costs involved in navigating such a drastic cultural change of

direction but at least the choice remains, albeit a belated, and now desired, cultural offering. The middle class person finding changes/crises in their own life, may find that the choices are wider although not as drastic, or as different, or as personally exciting as the challenge facing a working class person seeking university entrance. One wonders where the middle class person may decide to travel, having experienced significant personal change, presumably in many cases to the door of their therapist, Access too could be a cultural catharsis; 'a change is as good as a rest'.

### **Patterned Journeys**

Thus the title of the thesis, 'Journeys', is not intended to draw an analogy of 'life as a journey' as is the case with many literary works (although this may well be the case), but rather to highlight the personal morphogenesis of social life itself, where individuals through the morphogenetic properties of a wider structural/cultural environment, may go through many personal cyclical movements through their interaction with that environment. As such the dynamics of morphogenesis, social conditioning, social interaction and social elaboration, leading to new social conditioning, can be translated into and paralleled with, personal 'beginnings', 'middles' and 'ends', the individual's experiences through their socio-interaction with structure, culture and other individuals, each with their

own stories and their own journeys. Of course people are individuals and experience their own time and place in their own unique way but within the social context in which all stories are played out it is possible to draw comparisons, **tease out patterns**, similar or different stories, at the sociological level by concentration on socio-cultural properties.

Thus Cultural Elaboration is the future which is forged in the present, hammered out of past inheritance by current innovation. Because of this, the elaborated sequences through which culture is transformed are the joint products of the situational logics impinging from the Cultural System on contexts in which agents find themselves and their Socio-Cultural responses to them. This is the generic process by which the cultural future is made in the present. It is also what determines which form of future (not its contents) is made, and in turn **makes this a patterned not a patternless process** ... (there are) different scenarios which culminate in cultural morphogenesis and in none of these are the discursive changes which result in the least way arbitrary - **any more than the interplay between the Cultural System and Socio-Cultural interaction is a patternless process.** [Archer, 992: xxiv.] The emphasis is mine.]

Thus the thesis concerns personal morphogenesis through the patterned interplay between structure, culture and agency, asking the question why do working class students, with minimal educational requirements, decide to enter university, a decision that runs contrary to their working class cultural base. The argument will be that prior to making the decision the vast majority of the students experienced significant degrees of personal change and/or crisis in their lives which acted as a catalyst for more significant change and decision-making in

their desire to undertake an Open Access Course as a foundation year for university entrance, just as I had done in 1982 after volunteering for redundancy from a car factory in 1979. Had redundancy not been offered with the lure of the £7,000 then I would most probably, never have left the factory, never have started Access, never have gone to university, never have become a lecturer, never have written the words you are now reading.

My own journey as Access student, lecturer and course organiser, and the journey of others on the course set me thinking about why working class people chose to do Access? Thus, in answer to the very crucial and very reasonable question of why any researcher chose the research area in the first place, my answer lies in a 'study of structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors and the interplay of them affecting My (mature student's) decision to undertake an Open Access Course for possible entry to university'.

I certainly wasn't totally the determined factory fodder of an all consuming capitalist infrastructure nor a consensual robot believing in the cultural fairness of it all; I certainly didn't make all my decisions with complete free will and choice, devoid of those structural, cultural and familial conditions which constituted my social birth. Neither am I a 'walking, talking, middle ground' which would deny at one and

the same time my individuality and the structural/cultural interplay of the context from where I realised myself. I am neither top, middle nor bottom but like all other people comprise the elements of all three, and have the story of many beginnings, middles and ends, in the various chapters of the story that is me, **my personal morphogenesis, against an ever changing societal back-drop, which similarly has its own morphogenetic story line.**

Thus, why study Access specifically? Well I have been involved with Access for nearly twelve years, first as a mature student, second as a lecturer and third as a Access Course Co-ordinator for the past five years. As I moved through the FE and HE systems I began to realise just how significantly my own life was changing in terms of attitudes, thinking and personal life. I related this to why I wanted to do Access in the first place, and what had gone before, not least my voluntary redundancy after twelve years in a car factory prior to deciding on Access.

My own journey set me thinking about the journeys of others and whether there was any relationship between personal life changes and Access applications. There definitely seemed to be some kind of change occurring in people's lives before course commencement and from tutorials, informal discussions, application forms, and interviews it became clear that this was



indeed the case. The evidence from student contact, both written and oral, was overwhelmingly that Access did seem to be, the right course for the right person at the right time, representing an 'elective affinity' between them, though the specifics of this need to be disentangled and conceptualized prior to being theorized.

People applying for the course were asked to complete three separate A4 pages, one on their experience of education, one on their experience of work and one on why they wanted to do Access. The format of the questions were as follows: on the page requesting details of the student's educational history, 'On this page please write an account of your school/college background and how you feel about it. As with your view of work and other experience please write freely about your views on education'; and on the page requesting details of the student's work history, 'On this page please write an account of your work or other experience. Please try to write about not only the jobs you may have had, if any, but also how you felt about them. Please feel free to express yourself fully in this section'; and finally on the page requesting details of the students personal history, 'On this page please write an account of why you want to do Access, why you are in a position to undertake the course at the present time and how it fits in with your life situation; how this relates to your previous occupational, educational and other life experience'.

The informal, unstructured format of the application form was out of line with the application forms used for other Access Courses at the College, and with other Course application forms, such as those utilized for A level, GCSE, and a whole host of social, leisure, business and vocational courses, which all tended to employ a more orthodox, structured approach. In essence the difference between my own application form and that of other courses was the difference between open-ended and fixed-choice questionnaires in the social sciences. It was designed to give the applicant scope to say why they wanted to do Access and the biographical, familial, cultural and structural factors which facilitated their decision. The result was a focussed, socio-cultural story of the students' life journey to date and why Access seemed relevant to them at this particular juncture in their lives.

#### **A Morphogenetic Methodology; 'storylines'.**

The information on the application forms was like a sociologist's dream come true, (depending on what kind of sociologist you are), in terms of both the quantitative and qualitative material it contained. In the Preface to the First Edition of Working for Ford Huw Beynon gives an indication of why I saw the information as so fertile and what kind of sociologist I am. (The stress is mine.)

Little has happened, since Mills wrote his book, to suggest that the imagination of sociologists has helped matters. That these 'scientific' examiners of society have failed to make clear the issues that so deeply affect people's lives is a condemnation of them and their art. At best, they have written

with 'the profession' over their right shoulder, and produced sociology for sociologists: an absurdity which cuts the writer off from the subjects of his writing.

In writing *Working for Ford* I have tried to overcome this contrived isolation. I have never worked for Ford. I have told **the story of other people's experiences** ... made up of the conversation of men and women in the pub, the factory ... in their homes, combined in an attempt to describe the lives that people lead ... **to outline the crises they encounter and the way they try to make sense of them** ... the book is written for them in the hope that they, and others like them, **will be able to identify parts of themselves in the story and perhaps, thereby, see more clearly the way they are going.** [Beynon, Preface to the First Edition 1973, re-printed in the Second Edition 1984.]

Whilst not suggesting that Beynon is a morphogenecist, his statement encapsulates at one and the same time, not only the importance of the story line for morphogenecists as an dualistic analytical approach to the study of structure and agency, but also the compatible methodology, the story line technique, of the morphogenecists. Thus, in relation to the core of the thesis, personal morphogenesis through change and crisis, there is much compatibility with Beynon's intent... 'to outline the crises they encounter and the way they try to make sense of them', as with his statement ... 'to identify parts of themselves in the story' and very pertinently from a morphogenetic approach **possible futures** based on an understanding of the past and present story line ... 'and perhaps, thereby, see more clearly the way they are going'.

The end of the story is an important methodological crossroads within a morphogenetic cycle, since movement through, social

conditioning and socio-cultural interaction resulting in social elaboration, generates a new beginning, evidence of the transformative nature of cyclical change (for both structure and agency), remembering Archer's insistence on the need for re-thinking our theoretical conceptual approach to the new cycle.

The end-point and the whole point of examining any particular cycle is that we will then have provided an analytical **history** of emergence of the problematic properties under investigation. At this point, which is also the start of another cycle, the elaborated structure constitutes a new conditional influence upon subsequent interaction, and the concepts and theories we employ to deal with this next cycle may well have to change in order to explain this change our subject matter has undergone. [Archer, 1995. 91.]

To this end, were I researching what happens to the students after Access, the methodological cornerstone of my research would not rest on the application forms, 'the calling card for Access enrolment' but may take a more participant observational approach, informal conversations with them as their university degree **opens, unfolds and runs its course**. Cyclical movement, whether structural, cultural, familial or biographical requires a reflective methodology. One could even speculate that the methodology itself needs to be cyclical, a morphogenetic methodology, that is not thought up (as Beynon said in 'contrived isolation), but one that is delineated as the cycle under investigation runs its course. Hence although the application forms were designed with an end in view, to gain information from prospective students, and not as a deliberate research design, the information derived from them provided me

with a morphogenetic picture of where the students were coming from (their past), where they were now (their present) and where they intended going (their future); in short, sufficient temporal scope to explain their reasons for wanting to do Access and the biographical, familial, cultural and structural factors which facilitated their decision.

So whilst being supportive of the morphogenetic approach of Archer, and the work of Mills as outlined and supported by Beynon, and Beynon's own methodological approach, I am also aware that this does not absolve me from doing the sociology. I think there is a danger of Mills' oft quoted work being used as a liberal licence to neglect the nitty-gritty of critical sociological analysis, with the 'users' hiding behind 'meaningful', 'imaginative', studies, theses, books, heavy on biographical agency, light on structure, wishy-washy in content and lacking in temporal linkage of the two. In his criticism of 'abstracted empiricism', 'the statistical ritual' and 'the methodological inhibition' Mills was not calling for a sociology without guts but for one with heart. What he chastised and wanted rid of is more often remembered and quoted than what he cherished and called for. Having castigated that which he did not like in sociology and described that which he did, Mills, in a summary at the end of his book, provides the reader with in a kind of check list of what a 'sociological imagination' actually comprises:-

Always keep your eyes open to ... the image of history - your notion of how history is being made. In a word, continually

work out and revise your views of the problems of history, the problems of biography, and the problems of social structure in which biography and history intersect ... the problems of social science, when adequately formulated, must include both troubles and issues, both biography and history, and the range of their intricate relations. Within that range the life of the individual and the making of societies occur; and within that range the sociological imagination has its chance to make a difference in the quality of human life in our time. [Mills, 1977: 247-248.]

Clearly there is no absolution granted here for not doing our sociology, and indeed the task would appear to be much more arduous though fulfilling than the alienated production of the 'habitual distortions' of social science which Mills identified in the 1950s. His constant insistence on the need for a consideration of history, biography, structure and agency and the interplay between them, seems an early forerunner of the morphogenetic approach and indeed forty years on Archer has similar warnings for those not yet heeding the need to link structure and agency:-

Thus what has happened is that theorists dealing with the structuring and transformation of social organization have at least (and at last) converged on a common problem. Provision of a promising solution to this central problem is now accepted by many as a kind of litmus paper: theories which fail the acid test do effectively cede any claim to provide the framework for general social theory. (for example to find that some approach is wholly deterministic, entirely objectivistic, or exclusively microscopic is ground enough for ceasing to consider it as a serious claimant. [Archer, 1992: x.]

Hopefully, 'Journeys' and its theoretical and methodological underpinnings have not fallen prey to either abstracted empiricism nor to a reactionary liberal licence, and has 'been completed by holding fast to first principles ... constantly

adhering to analytical dualism' and thereby also avoided any of the one-sided theoretical distortions which accompany the over-accentuation of structure at the expense of agency and vice versa. [Archer, 1992: 304.]

Having established the theoretical and methodological foundations of the thesis, morphogenetic transformation, there now follows an outline of the thesis format, itself morphogenetic, as will become clear as the basis of each Chapter is summarized.

#### **Chapters One and Two: History and Biography; Structure and Agency**

Prior to concentration on the material derived from the students (Chapters Three to Seven), I 'take time out' to consider the two paramount issues of the morphogenetic approach, firstly, cyclical movement discussed in Chapter One, 'History and Biography' and secondly on the basis of cyclical movement, the relationship between 'Structure and Agency Interplay', Chapter Two. The purpose of the two Chapters is to set the morphogenetic scene, for the more detailed investigation of the students lives, journeys and personal morphogenesis, based on the evidence of their own written story lines, and the changes and crises they had experienced, the trigger for Access and the trigger for the research.

#### **Chapters Three, Education Profiles, Work Profiles, Personal Profiles and New Beginnings.**

The combined application forms for two successive academic

years, 1992-94, representing in total one hundred and seventeen students, and further providing an accurate representation of my experience of other yearly intakes, provide the empirical base for the research, via a content analysis of the students' experiences of education, work and reasons for seeking Access. It also provides an illumination of the personal morphogenesis that the students were going through at their time of application for Access. Keeping faith with their own story line, Chapter 3, 'Education Profiles' is called 'Beginnings', Chapter Four, 'Work Profiles' is called 'Middles' and Chapter Five, 'Personal Profiles' is called 'Endings'. Since morphogenesis also involves cyclical movement, Chapter Six, 'New Beginnings' looks in less detail at the students perceptions of the future, as part of their reasons for starting Access. This is because from a morphogenetic perspective, what comes after Access would indeed be an elaboration of what went before, a new story, a new cycle and as such requires that (as was stated earlier) '... the concepts and theories we employ to deal with this next cycle may well have to change in order to explain this change our subject matter has undergone. [Archer, 1995. 91.]

### **Chapter Seven: Elective Affinities**

Chapter Seven, 'Elective Affinities', teases out further the notion of change and/or crisis in the students lives and the relationship of such factors to changing ideas and the availability of the opportunity to realise them. The Chapter is



based not only on the material in the application forms, but also on information gleaned from interviews for the course and informal discussions with the students whilst they were on Access. Over the two years I also asked students to expand on the information on their application form by writing further on 'why Access?' Some of this information is also used in Chapter Seven. Finally I conducted a series of very informal interviews after Access, specifically designed for the research, involving ten students in all, and looking for more detail regarding change crisis combinations, based on the theoretical assumption that most of us carry 'ideas', around with us, ideas of change, which may or may not be realised until structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors permit.

## **Conclusions**

The Conclusion, is multi-faceted and thus called, 'Conclusions: Cultural Patterns and Biographical Maps', bringing together the arguments and material presented throughout the research. The two main approaches of the Chapter are firstly, a consideration of the theoretical implications of the investigation and secondly, by drawing together the students story lines, to uncover common structural and cultural signposts on the road to Access. Finally, in true morphogenetic fashion, since conclusions pave the way for new beginnings, I also discuss the possibilities for further research, specifically the notion of how the decision to join Access is finally resolved in terms of

the opportunity costs involved and the combination of 'affinities' promoting (or subduing) the prospects for personal change and finally the affects of personal change on others close to the person experiencing the change/crisis situation.

The practical results in terms of course statistics was that from the time of my appointment as Course Co-ordinator the student intake increased from approximately thirty per cent to sixty per cent, the retention rate rose from fifty per cent (approx.) to eight per cent (approx.) and the success rate in terms of students obtaining a place at university rose from approximately sixty per cent to ninety per cent; we attracted more, we kept more and more went on to higher education. The point of this is not to blow my own trumpet but to emphasise that the Course was working exceptionally well, breaking all Access records, and that success I think was the result of the compatibility the overall course philosophy **tuning in with student biographies and cultural background and their own morphogenesis, in short 'elective affinity' in action.** We all learned a lot. I continue to do so with each new biographical and cultural intake of people, as they fuse with each others' and my own societal make-up; personal morphogenesis through socio-cultural interaction against an ever-changing interactive backdrop of structural and cultural change.

I am taking the liberty to re-quote and paraphrase Beynon by my

stressed interjection; 'The names are their names and the book(the course) is written (was designed) for them in the hope that they, and others like them, will be able to identify parts of themselves in the story (in the course philosophy and design) and perhaps, thereby, see more clearly the way they are going (make structural, cultural, familial and biographical sense of their past, their present and their anticipated future, in short, experiential, morphogenetic sense of their Access year as a basis for university entry and their new cultural story.) [Beynon, 1984: Preface to the First Edition.]

Taking the morphogenetic approach to its ultimate analysis, we could make the decision to look at the life of just one individual, any individual, through utilising a quadrumanous cyclical combination of, structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors in interplay over time. Indeed, the thesis attempts to do this and more, by looking at a hundred and seventeen lives within a given structural and cultural situation, teasing out cultural patterns and similar story lines. Thus, possible charges that the target group was numerically insufficient, or that the study looked at only one Access Course at one college of further education, would be missing the point of the research (missing the point of analytical dualism), namely to further an understanding of morphogenesis in human society and human lives. It claims neither qualitative status, due to its smaller proportions, (as a classic microscopic approach might claim), since it is not a

microscopic approach, nor quantitative status, due to its structural emphasis on social class and gender and one hundred and seventeen working class students, (as a classic macroscopic approach might claim), since it is not a macroscopic approach. The study of movement, of change, which are central to the morphogenetic approach, could have chosen to concentrate on one life, one family, one social group, one collectivity, even under certain definitions one society, since the emphasis is on the unfolding story line of a particular social entity.

However given the limitations of the research, the study does not attempt the application of morphogenesis **too tightly to the life of one individual** nor at the other end of the continuum, **too loosely to a whole society**, but rather attempts a more realistic approach, by selecting multi-faceted social properties, structural, cultural, familial and biographical, **as a broad sociological testing ground for a morphogenetic account of the interplay between these properties**. Thus within these structural, cultural, familial and biographical properties, a whole range of social factors and 'facts', institutions and processes have thus been incorporated, including social class, gender, age, education, work, family life, marriage, marital breakdown, and so on and so forth. (Clearly the list is not exhaustive but selective and reflective of the main issues involved in crossing cultural boundaries; once again due to the limitations of the research format one has to pin one's butterfly to the board so-to-speak. I am aware for instance

that the study could be re-formulated solely in terms of ethnicity and its accompanying issues.)

From a hermeneutic perspective, it has also provided much scope for an understanding of human meaning, behind human action, in two ways: firstly by letting the students speak for themselves, and letting the reader assess for themselves my interpretation of that meaning, enabling you to put your meaning of my meaning on their meaning, a treble hermeneutic; secondly, as well as a consideration of social institutions and processes, hard 'social facts' so-to-speak, within each 'Profile' Chapter, 'Education' (Ch.3), 'Work' (Ch.4), 'Personal' Ch.5), 'Elective Affinities' (Ch.6) and New Beginnings (Ch.7), there has been much space and scope allotted for consideration and exploration of attitudes, feelings, emotions, ideas, aspirations, dreams, on the part of the students, towards those same social institutions and process, in short the subjective meanings of objective realities. Indeed, the format of the thesis seeks to accentuate these very properties which lie at the heart of the morphogenetic approach and as such may break certain traditions in the chosen style and presentation of both statistical and narrative information. In particular the tables used in Chapter One, reflecting the students' educational and employment history are deliberately presented in list form, rather than the more usual generalised groupings such as manual and non-manual workers for instance, to descriptively accentuate the type and form of their educational under-achievement and their

non-middle class occupational backgrounds. Thus, the quantitative picture is deliberately teased out by concentration on the specificity of the education and work record of the students, without recourse to a more cumulative generalised format, which seems to neutralise the impact of 'primary' data by standard sociological groupings which tend to place a '**second-hand**' meaning on '**first-hand**' information'. It is important I believe to know whether a person was an aerial rigger, a labourer, a roadsweeper, a window cleaner or a florist, rather than accumulating the occupations into a manual, non-manual tabulation. Similarly in the presentation of students' statements the quantity of **numerical responses** is reflected in the **qualitative responses** that follow the relevant table. Thus, rather than seeking to provide the reader with a limited qualitative flavour of the quantitative responses, quite often the usual practice in social research, I have **deliberately emphasised the quantitative within the qualitative** to accentuate the biography of each in relation to each, culturally and structurally.

One final corollary, the translation of individual human biography into the language of familial, cultural and structural readings, does not mean to detract from the importance of each individual life, to the individual, from society or from history, for the analytical equation is uniquely reversible since ultimately history and society can also be presented through the language of biographical readings.

## CHAPTER ONE

### MORPHOGENETIC CYCLES: HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

The title of the thesis, 'Journeys; Personal morphogenesis: A study of the interplay between structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors affecting mature students' decisions to undertake an Open Access Course for possible entry to university', is of course a study of structure and agency. In the Introduction, the main emphasis was on the relationship between the two and the best way to investigate and analyse the them. Chapter One emphasises that part of the title 'the interplay', as a temporal entity, the key to any understanding of structure and agency. Since the study looks at the biography of the Access students and a consideration of their biographical morphogenetic journey to the point of Access, then attention needs to be directed on the past, **be it the biographical past of the individual or the historical past of society**. Indeed all of our biographies are played out against a structural cultural back drop which is the inherited social scenery of past generations, a product of the socio-cultural interaction of their own time and place. History tells us a lot, helps us understand the present, structurally, culturally and in terms of our familial and biographical details.

History is of course the ultimate social research bank, yet like all data depends on how we interpret it. The key for sociological analysis, and the cornerstone of the morphogenetic

approach, is to look for cultural, structural patterns, movements, cyclical changes. In his discussion of the temporal relationship between the individual and society, C. Wright Mills brings these components together:-

Social science deals with problems of biography, of history, and their intersections within social structures. That these three - biography, history, society - are the co-ordinate points of the proper study of man has been a major platform on which I have stood when criticising several current schools of sociology whose practitioners have abandoned this classic tradition. The problems of our time - which now include the problem of man's very nature - cannot be stated adequately without consistent practice of the view that history is the shank of social study, and recognition of the need to develop further a psychology of man that is sociologically grounded and historically relevant. [Mills, 1977: 159.]

What has gone before, has to be the starting point for what is happening now, and what may happen in the future.

#### **Chronological and aeonic temporality.**

Thus, the Access application forms capture the best of three temporal worlds, since they constitute people writing about their **past in the present**, and since they are writing about massive cultural/life changes, in their 'Personal Profiles', they are also writing about beginnings, middles, and ends, and with joining Access, **anticipated futures**. The story is their own, the story is cyclical. The research approach can be applied to actors both living and dead, by identification of cyclical movement, by identification of stories, of biographies, which ultimately are part of a wider structural and cultural framework, which ultimately are part of history,



generated by past actors, in a prior structural/cultural context. It is also worth considering that the total life span of the one hundred and seventeen is in excess of three thousand years, which is an awful lot of biography, an awful lot of history, an awful lot of interplay, an awful lot of stories.

Mills again:-

It is of course quite clear that to understand a slow-moving society, trapped for centuries in a cycle of poverty and tradition and disease and ignorance, requires that we study the historical ground, and the persistent historical mechanisms of its terrible entrapment in its own history. Explanation of that cycle, and of the mechanics of each of its phases, require a very deep-going historical analysis. **What is to be explained, first of all, is the mechanism of the full cycle.** [Mills, 1977: 172.]

The bold type is mine to indicate the importance of what Mills is saying, in relation to what I have been saying, about social research methods, about methodology, about theory, about history, about movement, about people and society, about agency and structure, about biography, about history. It is as ever the story line that matters, be it a structural story, a cultural story, a familial story, a biographical story. Time as we understand it in the chronological sense whilst indispensable is not the analytical issue, but rather the phases in the storyline, which if not considered, may provide us with a false temporal premise for commencing our socio-historical investigations. Dennis Potter talking about his work, 'The Singing Detective', sheds I think some very important light on the subject of biography, history, society and time.

What I was trying to do with 'The Singing Detective' was to make the whole thing a detective story, but a detective story about how you find out about yourself. You've got this super fluidity of clues which is what we all have, and very few solutions, maybe no solutions, but that the very act of garnering the clues and the very act of remembering, not merely an event but how that event has lodged in you and how that event has affected the way you see things, begins to resemble a system of values, and only when that system, no matter how tenuous it might be, is assembled, was Marlow able to get up out of his bed, which is why it isn't about psoriasis, or detectives, or that particular childhood, but about the way that we can protect that sovereignty that we have and it is all that we have. And it is the most precious of all the human capacities, even beyond language, even, it is almost impossible to talk about it because you're against the very rim of communication when you try to talk about it. But, by being able to use, say, the musical convention and the autobiographical in quotes convention and making them co-exist at the same time, so that the past and the present weren't in strict sequence, because they aren't. They are in one sense, obviously, in a calendar sense, but they're not in your head in that sequence, and neither are they in the terms of the way you discover things about yourself where an event twenty years ago can become more, it can follow yesterday instead of proceeding it. But only out of the morass, if you like, of evidence, of clues, and searchings, and strivings, which is the metaphor for the way we live, we can start to put up the structure called self, out of which, we can walk out of the structure saying, at least I know and you know better than before, what it is we are. [Potter, 1987: BBC2.]

No apologies for the length of the quote. It says a lot about what I have been trying, probably very inadequately to say, but as Potter put it, 'you're against the very rim of communication, when you try to talk about it'. In relation to history, not as I've argued simply a chronological history, but a story line between players (agency) and scenery (structure) which needs teasing out and putting into appropriate sequences which analytically assist explanation and intelligibility, then Potter's discussion about the biographical matters and the way we find out about ourselves is useful to an understanding of

the life of the individual. Of course Potter is not denying our 'calendrical self', but rather combining the shared general chronological moment of us all with the specific personal/biographical, aeonic of each. It is thus, only within the context of the continuous 'calendrical' self, that our 'personal aeonic jigsaw' is sorted out, the biographical pieces fitted together. We thus need the general continuous, calendrical self in relation to others in society, precisely in order to reflect, re-order, our own biography, our story line, our personal morphogenesis.

Thus, paraphrasing the last sentence of his discussion by the insertion of history rather than biography we could say that ... 'But only out of the morass of evidence, of clues, which is the metaphor for the way history works, we can start to put up the structure called society, out of which, we can stand back and look at that structure, saying at at last we know better than before, what it is and how it works'. From a morphogenetic approach we can do this with both structure and agency, precisely because structure and agency, due to the time variable, have been kept separate, and thus each can reflect, theorise, explain the former. As Laing states, 'We require a history of phenomena ; not simply more phenomena of history'. [Laing, 1990: 117.]

In similar terms, R.D. Laing has written of 'the oldest voyage in the world', the voyage of self-discovery. For him, the

stifling mechanisms of social structures, synonymous with modern society, can lead to immense personal alienation. In a kind of social phenomenological checklist of personal morphogenesis, Laing has chartered the main stages of such a voyage:-

What is entailed then is:

- (i) a voyage from outer to inner,
- (ii) from life to a kind of death,
- (iii) from going forward to going back,
- (iv) from temporal movement to temporal standstill,
- (v) from mundane time to aeonic time,
- (vi) from the ego to the self,
- (vii) from being outside (post-birth) back into the womb of all things (pre-birth),

and then subsequently a return voyage from

- (1) inner to outer
  - (2) from death to life,
  - (3) from the movement back to a movement once more forward,
  - (4) from immortality back to mortality,
  - (5) from eternity back to time,
  - (6) from self to a new ego,
  - (7) from a cosmic foetalization to an existential rebirth.
- [R.D. Laing,\* 1990: 106.]

Chronologically, of course, the clock still ticks on, but within chronological movement, both biography and history are also played out, the story line of each, the morphogenesis of each. And from both Potter's and Laing's perspective within the dualism of that temporality, the individual attempts to make sense of their own story line, through assembling the pieces of their structural, cultural and biographical moment, as it appears to them, aeonic temporality within chronological movement.

Similarly, social structure, represented by its agential human

collectivities, social class, gender, ethnicity etc., culturally advantaged and disadvantaged groups, mirrors that same changing cultural kaleidoscope. Thus time itself, at one level is personal, cultural, structural and metaphysical to each of us and all of us, in the sense that Potter and Laing, discuss the differences between the general chronological and the personal aeonic concepts of time. **The point is that we have both,** we cannot stop the clock, but both individually and as sociologists, we can attach different subjective meanings or social importance or analytical subdivisions to it, without ever having the capacity to stop the clock ticking, even if we 'change the calendar', as has been done. **Thus, our individuality can attach subjective meanings to our personal biography and the journey we seem to travel.**

The relationship that both Potter and Laing identify, between personal cultural breakdown and renewed and reviewed cultural perception, is not that far removed from what some sociologists have argued: Mills for instance, writing in the fifties and the writers from the morphogenetic perspective writing today. Both approaches have clear parallels to the biographical journey the Access students are travelling in relation to familial, cultural and structural factors affecting their life situations and in relation to this, their decision to return to education.

To this end biography and history are at one and the same time the same thing, by the non-chronological mechanisms of their

agential and structural movement, but totally separate due to the chronological mechanisms of their temporal relationship.

The relevance of history, in short, is itself subject to the principle of historical specificity. 'Everything', to be sure, may be said always to have 'come out of the past', but the meaning of that phrase - 'to come out of the past' - is what is at issue. Sometimes there are quite new things in the world, which is not to say that 'history' does and 'history' does not 'repeat itself'; it depends upon the social structure and upon the period with whose history we are concerned. [Mills, 1977: 173.]

Thus, the mechanism of socio-historical movement is the crucial factor to understand, the storyline, the process rather than the product. So when Mills says that 'history does ... and does not repeat itself', [Mills, 1977: 173.] **the paradox is explicable morphogenetically**, 'This is the generic process by which the cultural future is made in the present. It also determines which form of future (not its contents) is made'. [Archer, 1992: xxiv.]

Or as Paul Valery says, 'Every beginning is a consequence - every beginning ends something'. [In Auden (ed.) 1974: 228.]

#### **Access applications and interaction; cultural and structural morphogenesis.**

The biographical story line of the Access students, from the hypothesis and the cyclical biographies contained within the application forms (Chapters 3-5), the course interviews, informal discussions with Access students over a five year period, the written statements they gave me over the same period and the in-depth research interviews (Chapter 7), are

all concerned with the issue of why they want to join Access, why they want to go to university, why such a change, simultaneously being an ending, and a new beginning, a biographical elaboration. The story of the Access students, at one level, is an education story, starting from one educational moment, school life, and ending with another, a new, educational moment, enrolling on Access. At another level, it is a cultural story, starting from one cultural moment, working class life, ending with another, enrolling on Access, with a desire to go to university, moving with or without desire to another, a new cultural moment, middle class life.

Thus, applicants for the course were in essence invited to tell a cultural and experiential, chronological and aemonic 'story', of their own lives in relation to wider social structures, including family life, school life, work life, marriage, health and illness, etc., all of which are culturally specific to different social groupings, social class and gender roles for instance. Since each section on the application forms was represented by a single A4 page, then each page told a part of a story, each 'story' told in some detail averaging five hundred words across the three pages, providing ample scope for expansion and elaboration of students' views and experiences. Finally, the total number of application forms analysed, one hundred and seventeen, provided sufficient information for both quantitative and qualitative analysis in terms of biographical patterns in relation to structural/cultural changes.

I thus made the decision to base part of the methodology on the information contained in the application forms, dividing it into three categories, 'Education Profiles', Chapter Three, 'Work Profiles', Chapter Four, and 'Personal Profiles', Chapter Five. The rationale of 'the division of methodological labour' is the notion of a 'journey', whose 'beginnings', 'middles' and 'ends', are represented respectively by 'school', 'work', and 'reasons for doing Access'. Something more though, much more, as stated earlier, the 'reasons for Access', represented not only 'endings' but also 'beginnings', 'new beginnings', thus suggesting cyclical movement and in turn suggesting morphogenesis. The biographical, familial, cultural and structural circumstances of the students seemed to be fusing into an elaboration of a kind, a present catalyst for change, for a new future, based on past experiences.

Thus, much of the research, in fact the core of the thesis, is an analysis of personal/cultural transformation as part of a cyclical movement, related to wider structural, cultural and familial change or crisis in their lives; they have in essence been experiencing a personal morphogenesis, a 'journey' which has lead them to Access and the desire to enter university. The supportive theoretical material in this analysis comes from utilising and combining the morphogenesis approach, particularly the work of Margaret Archer, Culture and Agency: the Place of Culture in Social Theory, 1992, the work of R.D. Laing, particularly, The Politics of Experience, 1990. Huw



Beynon's Working for Ford, 1984, has also been a valuable source of understanding working class culture, what it culturally means to be working class, the way of thinking, the 'ideas' of working class life, and the socio-economic restrictions impeding personal change. Beynon's work also provided me with a degree of confidence in terms of my own methodology, with the story being told by the students and the thesis attempting to plot the story line. Beynon puts it very well:-

While I wanted people to follow and relate to 'the story', I also wanted the book to raise and encourage questions about 'story telling' in general. Put baldly, I hoped that Working for Ford might help encourage workers to write themselves, and sociologists to write differently. That ... is still my hope. [Beynon, 1984: 22]

The stress is mine, to emphasis the latent morphogenetic format of Beynon's work, and the similar complementary manner in which he knits the story line of all three social factors, structural forces, cultural scenery and biographical accounts of the workers and their familial background. Paraphrasing Beynon (as I did in the Introduction), 'While I wanted people to follow and relate to the 'journey' I also wanted the thesis to raise and encourage questions about personal, cultural and structural, morphogenesis in general. Put baldly, I hope that Access Journeys have encouraged mature students to write freely about themselves, and me to write differently'.

### **Biographical journeys; personal morphogenesis**

The thesis then is about 'Journeys', about 'stories', about

biographical maps through an ever changing structural, cultural and familial landscape. Whereas the concept of physical journeys means physical movement, from A to B, then the concept of biographical journeys centres on personal movement, the changing of personal ideas, as a result of socio-cultural interaction, from thinking one way to thinking another. From such an interactive process, both the traveller and the landscape are changed. Margaret Archer's approach to morphogenesis, centres on the temporal interplay of structure, culture and agency, in a cyclical movement. As she states:-

Agents, from the morphogenetic perspective, are agents of something. Baldly, they are agents of socio-cultural systems into which they are born (groups or collectivities in the same position or situations) and equally they are agents of the systemic features they transform (since groups and collectivities are modified in the process). Fundamentally this is a shorthand account of the morphogenesis of agency: the drama of interaction may be centuries long, but the storyline is a simple one of pre-grouping and re-grouping. [Archer, 1995: 257.]

In its basic schema, and the need for summary, the above may sound rather too streamlined, socio-clinical, mechanical movement, but although the key relationship is to time, or more precisely analytic dualism, the temporal separation of agency and structure, of ideas and ideas made structural flesh, the morphogenetic dynamics have more to do with how the clock works rather being clockwork.

Thus the interface ... is always 'the present', wherever that happens to be situated historically. However, this T1 (present time) is peculiarly pivotal in the morphogenetic approach. As Markovic expressed it, both 'past and future are living in the present. Whatever human beings do in the present is decisively influenced by the past and by the future ... the future is not

something that will come later, independently of our will. There are several possible futures and one of them has to be made.' [Archer, 1992: xxii.] (Markovic pp. 10-11).]

In line with the above, the thesis is looking at the changing ideas of the Access students as working class people. Their decision to join Access as a gateway to university is testimony of attempting to make a future, is testimony of wanting to move from their past, it having decisively influenced their present and their ideas for the future. Without consideration of what has been, how can we consider what should come next, and in essence such temporal permutations become our present, the triadic fusion of that which has been, that which may come, and that which is.

Once again from a morphogenetic perspective the time dimension is of crucial importance in such analysis since time is linked to the dynamics of social change, of the interplay between agency and structure, by it not being used as a mere temporal backdrop to the unfolding story line. As Archer states:-

Time is incorporated as a theoretical variable rather than simply as a medium in which events take place. This represents the methodological key to the experiential problem of how we can simultaneously feel bound to plod round the cultural treadmill yet also brim over with criticism and creativity - the tension between being conditioned to do things one way but being able to conceive of doing them differently. [Archer, 1992: xxii]

In essence time, place and people are crucial for understanding why change occurs and when change occurs, and who is involved in the change, a concept not too dissimilar from Weber's

elective affinity. Since the story, the morphogenesis, unfolds over time, then the key to understanding change, is to understand the story line, to understand time in relation to both the person and the cultural/structural context. Indeed, as with many good stories, the hero/heroine of the drama, may not make their entrance in the play until the end of Scene Three, Act One, but without an understanding of Scene One and Scene Two in Act One, and the playwright's reason for the 'build-up', we would not be in a position to understand why the entrance in Scene Three, and how this will affect the hero's/heroine's story in the present tense, their entrance in Act One, Scene Three, and the end of the story, Act Three, Scene Three. A weak story line, means that the actors cannot be understood in relation to the passing of time, and consequently and importantly in relation to each other.

Without the story line, without the concept of the passing of time, we are not able to place the characters in the situations they confront, and thus not able to understand their respective positions and roles, nor consequently their relations to each other. Archer is critical of the structurationist approach, seeing it as eliding agency and structure in a temporal fusion, a methodological impossibility, since they are separated over time and by time, and states that by attempting to conflate cultural ideas and their holders:-

Those who endorse the 'duality of culture', rather than analytical dualism, then simply oscillate between the two, insisting on both but unable to tell us when one rather than

the other will predominate. Thus they talk about our inescapable contribution to the recursiveness of culture, because our very practices have, perforce, to draw on language, rule and signification schemes and thus reproduce them, but simultaneously they insist that praxis itself can always introduce cultural transformation. **Cultural change thus becomes an immanent but indeterminate possibility, equally likely or unlikely at any given moment and therefore unpredictable and inexplicable.** [Archer, 1992: p.xxiii.] (The stress is mine.)

Access students arrive on Access for a reason or reasons. Their application is far from willy nilly, far from the luck of the draw, far from chance, far from being '**unpredictable and inexplicable**'. The fact that most working class people do not want to go to university, do not go to university, is testimony enough to the different story lines of those who do. The application forms reveal the stories of their authors, about their past, their present, and their aspirations for the future. The plot is there for all to see, as is the story within a story, their biographical experience of society, their personal morphogenesis, placed within its cultural structural time and place, which in turn has its own morphogenesis, the temporal interplay of structure and culture over time.

The Access students have changed, are in a process of change, are anticipating and desiring further change, namely university entrance. The core of the thesis is to examine sociologically why that change is occurring and this is only possible by looking at their biographical story lines, their past, their present and the future as they see it, in short their personal morphogenesis. Obviously, there is always a need to remember

the structural/cultural backdrop (a story or rather two stories in themselves) against which the biographical stories are constrained and enabled to unfold and to make sense, and during the course of the study reference will be made to the importance of this. Nevertheless, within the limitations and scope of the research, biography and personal change will be the main focus of analysis. In sociological terms this represents a consideration of the microscopic with an ever awareness of the macroscopic, the players are primary but never detached from the scenery. Such a task becomes sociological second nature when one works from a morphogenetic approach, when one considers the story line, the temporal cycles, since the need for and the sense of analytic dualism are ever present. Indeed, the strength of morphogenetic analysis, based upon analytic dualism is that, 'it is an artifice of methodological convenience for the components which it disentangles overlap and intertwine in reality. Far from this constituting a limitation of the approach, it is precisely what gives this method of analysis its utility.' [Archer,1992: 228.]

Analytic dualism can be used by any researcher to gain theoretical purchase on much smaller problems where the major difficulty of seeing the wood from the trees becomes much more tractable if they can be sorted out into the components of temporal cycles of morphogenesis - however short the time-span involved may be. [Archer, 1992: 228.]

The time-span involved in the research is short, is biographical, being restricted to one portion of the lives of working class people returning to education, desiring

university entry. The main methodological point of the thesis is to ask the question, why should this be so, for working class people do not usually go to university, due to the structural conditioning of society, and by definition of their cultural situation do not want to go to university. Their social disadvantage is structurally and culturally constituted, though the two elements are separable. Their biographical details are crucial to an understanding of why they are going against the socio-cultural grain, and by studying their biography in this way, then ... 'the major difficulty of seeing the wood from the trees becomes much more tractable if they can be sorted out into the components of temporal cycles of (personal) morphogenesis'. [Archer, 1992: 228, with my stressed insertion.] It will be argued that their biographies can be read morphogenetically and the reason(s) for their desire to go to university, namely anticipated and non-anticipated life changes (crises), can be read morphogenetically, can be read as both the 'end' and 'new beginning' of an unfolding story.

### **Personal morphogenesis; Laing's concept of 'life journeys'**

R.D. Laing believed that people are on a cyclical journey through life, a changing individual ontology related to the experience of living and the problems encountered in changing or attempting to change a personal, but first taught, cultural ontology. Personal change, or rather attempts at personal change can often bring reactionary though well intentioned strategies from those nearest and dearest to us, family,

partners, and friends. The problems of the individual, experiencing personal change, often in a state of personal anomie, relate to wider structural, cultural and familial norms of social behaviour and the constraints they impose on individual consciousness and individuality. In its extreme interpretation, personal change, personal non-conformity can be viewed as mental illness, which constitutes much of the thinking behind Laing's life work. He states:-

Our society is a plural one in many aspects. Any one person is likely to be a participant in a number of groups, which may have not only different membership, but quite different forms of unification ... Each group requires more or less radical internal transformation of the persons who comprise it. Consider the metamorphoses that the one man may go through in one day as he moves from one mode of sociality to another - family man, speck of crowd dust, functionary in the organization, friend. These are not simply different roles: each is a whole past and present and future, offering differing options and constraints, different degrees of change or inertia, different kinds of closeness and distance, different sets of rights and obligations, different pledges and promises ... I know of no theory of the individual that fully recognises this. There is every temptation to start with a notion of some supposed basic personality, but halo effects are not reducible to one internal system. [Laing, 1990: 82.]

Within the accepted structural/cultural format of role-differentiation and accumulation outlined above, Laing believed that individuals also go through many cyclical movements, 'beginnings', 'middles' and 'ends' within their life, and often get 'stuck' in one or the other. His early diagnostic sessions would seek to find out where the person is at in their life, a beginning, a middle or an end, and then proceed to treat them accordingly, morphogenetically, by illuminating to them their point in the present cycle. **The beginning is resolved by being**



able to move on to the middle, the middle resolved by being able to move on to the end, the end resolved, bearing with it a new beginning and a new cycle commences. The application of such an approach towards individual biography has a compatibility with the morphogenetic approach toward structure, culture and agency. In a television interview Laing elaborated on his notion of the 'cyclical journey':

Most people come along with a problem and whether it's in relationship to their business, or work, to their personal life to their sex life, or to their family life, the problem locates, if you listen to them, to a certain moment in a drama which you can say has a beginning, a middle and an end. People can get stuck before they begin, they can get stuck at the beginning, they can get stuck in the middle and they can get stuck in having got that far, but they somehow or other can't get themselves out of it.

Some people are always talking about being in it and they can't get out of it. They've got in, they're in, and now they can't get out of it. They're in depression. They're not just in sadness. They're stuck in their depression and then there is a lot of terminology about being stuck.

Some people are always full of bright ideas. They're always beginning everything. They're always starting. Everything's a new day. But they never get anywhere because everyday is the same, exactly the same, everything is new, everyday is a new beginning. They never get into the middle and they never get into the end. They're dead and they still haven't started.

A lot of people feel that they're dead. So okay, that's where they are. So if you're dead, you've got to start where you are, you've got to get into life, and you don't just move from being dead to being born, you've got to be conceived in the first place and go through the whole process before you can be born. So the whole sequence is from conception, through the incubation period. You have an idea, it occurs to you, it's up in the air, it's not embedded, you've got to settle it down, you've got to get into it and it gets into you. Then there's a whole period of gestation when you are working it out and so on, but it is not ready to present to the world yet; and then it is ready to present to the world. And the idea can never be born unless it has been seeded in the first place and gone through a whole lot of things.

Well in this process which affects every aspect of life, every

aspect of life goes through this process, everything has a beginning, a middle and an end. Now using this simple schema, this map, I can see where people are and address myself accordingly. [Laing, 1990: Channel 4 Television.]

Laing seems to be forwarding a theory of biographical movement approaching personal morphogenesis, and of course the similarity of connotations with Archer's morphogenetic approach towards structural and cultural properties are obvious. So in relation to personal biography, when Laing says, 'using this simple schema, this map, I can see where people are and address myself accordingly', his statement bears comparison to the social investigative approach of the morphogenecist, looking for the structural cultural story line, structural/cultural conditioning (the beginning), socio-cultural interaction (the middle), structural/cultural elaboration (the end and new beginning).

The thesis is looking at why people change cultural direction, representing a new beginning, significantly in the case of the Access students, by seeking university entrance. The hypothesis is that such decisions are made due to personal changes, anticipated or non-anticipated, in their life situation, such as children settled at school, children left home, redundancy prior to starting the course, ill-health, marital breakdown etc. and that such movement represents the end (and a new beginning) of a personal morphogenetic cycle. The trigger of change, the activation, the crisis, needs to be understood in relation to what had gone before, education and work for

instance. Basically the students' lives may well have been culturally knitted together, but faced with sudden change, what appeared to be 'well knitted' can, on reflection, appear to be 'well knotted'.

In his book 'Knots' Laing explores the situations in which people become biographically stuck in the structural, cultural, familial morass of their life situation. The desire to change is difficult, not least due to the complexity of change, having first to disentangle the biographical, cultural 'knots' in which one has found oneself culturally entangled. In the foreword to 'Knots' Laing emphasises the terminology used by people to describe their predicament:-

The patterns delineated here have not yet been classified by a Linnaeus of human bondage. They are all, perhaps, strangely familiar. In these pages I have confined myself to laying out only some of those I actually have seen. Words that come to mind to name them are: knots, tangles, fankles, impasses, disjunctions, whirligogs, binds. I could have remained closer to the 'raw' data in which these patterns appear. I could have distilled them further towards an abstract logico-mathematical calculus. I hope they are not so schematized that one may not refer back to the very specific experiences from which they derive; yet that they are sufficiently independent of 'content', for one to divine the final formal elegance in these webs of maya. [Laing, 1970.]

The problem of course is knowing oneself, of feeling oneself, to be part of a structural cultural society, sometimes advantageous, sometimes disadvantageous, and often accompanying the latter (though not solely), feelings of being trapped, of being denied one's individuality. Mills has written of the same in the fifties:-

Nowadays men often feel that their private lives are a series of traps. They sense that within their everyday worlds, they cannot overcome their troubles, and in this feeling, they are often quite correct: what ordinary men are directly aware of and what they try to do are bounded by the private orbits in which they live; their visions and their powers are limited to the close-up scenes of job, family, neighbourhood ... Underlying this sense of being trapped are seemingly impersonal changes in the very structure of continent-wide societies. The facts of contemporary history are also facts about the success and the failure of individual men and women ... Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both." [Mills, 1959: 9]

The first problem, the first 'trap', of individual human beings are the cultural collectivities to which we all involuntarily subscribe via our birth culture. We are at one and the same time an individual and part of a structure, part of cultural associations of other individuals, some with cultural advantage, most with degrees of cultural disadvantage. Thus, our participation is dualistic, through our agency and through the structures, we participate in both, and separably, since social structures are not reducible to collective humanity. The second problem is, how best to understand the two and the relationship between them and how best to cope with them. The former is the business of sociology, the latter the yoke of us all. As Archer writes:-

For it is part and parcel of daily experience to feel both free and enchained, capable of shaping our own future and yet confronted by towering, seemingly impersonal, constraints ... Consequently in facing up to the problem of structure and agency social theorists are not just addressing crucial technical problems in the study of society, they are also confronting the most pressing social problem of the human condition. [Archer, 1992: x.]

Archer's paints the same canvas as Mills, the problematic relationship between the individual and society. She also introduces the notion of feeling 'free and enchained' at one and the same time. What faces the human condition is also what faces sociologists, and there is a relationship between how we, as sociologists, see those two faces of society and individuality, of structure and agency. Our perceptions of what we see will shape our understanding and our methodology. Hence the problems of society are the problems of sociology are the problems of social research. Mills writes that ...

We have come to know that every individual lives, from one generation to the next, in some society; that he lives out a biography, and that he lives it out within some historical sequence. By the fact of his living he contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history, even as he is made by society and by its historical push and shove ... The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society." [Mills, 1959: 12.]

### **Cultural kaleidoscopes**

When Mills wrote in the above statement that the individual, 'By the fact of his living ... contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history.' I think he has a point, a good point, a crucial point. When individuals are born into society, which is ready-made for them, they are not born into a structural fortress but a kaleidoscopic cultural honeycomb, of gender, of social class, of ethnic groups, of religious groups, of different age groups, socialisation processes, complete with the specific values and

norms accompanying the roles they are taught to live, usually within a family unit. The individual must be seen within the context of this structural/cultural/familial kaleidoscope and their biographical experience of their own time and place. Such experience, such structures, such cultures are by no means static but as the kaleidoscope analogy suggests, are moving interrelated socio-historical entities. Thus the format of the research will stress, structure, culture, biography, and human experience of them, within an historical changing but irrevocably linked framework.

Open Access students need to be understood within the above structural framework, both in terms of a wider society and specifically to its educational institutions. This is the relationship of changing social structures to the individual but in turn this needs to relate to the socio-cultural background of the students themselves and the development of social class. Paradoxically the cultural generality of the students' cultural base, their social class, their gender, etc. also helps us to understand the specific circumstances accounting for why they, unlike most from their own cultural base, are doing Access. The specifics of their social circumstances can be understood not only in relation to where they come from but also what they feel; their experience of their socialised cultural roles and why these may have changed.

Thus our birth ontology, the familial, cultural, structural, social baptism into whatever social group(s), collectivities we unwittingly find ourselves belonging to, becomes the first blueprint for our social journey. This of course is the Interactionists' weakest card, and the Structuralists' strongest one, although ultimately they too are holding a losing hand, for social baptism in the societal font is no guarantee of self confirmation of the same in later years. Just as the first waters break to give us life, so the structural cultural conditioning may burst, since agency does not always hold true to socio-cultural conditioning.

#### **Access students and biographical change**

Change is the key factor in the lives of the Access students before joining the Course and the social trigger behind their reasons for joining in the first place. Access students tend to be of a certain type. Their first lowest common denominator is their intention as mature people to undertake an Access course. This in itself can be seen as our first 'social fact', only understandable in relation to other social facts including their 'maturity', their social class and their gender. The linkage underlying all of these themes, these 'facts,' is the applicants' lack of formal educational qualifications and their desire to enter higher education and complete a degree.

Three Tables summarize the social background of the one hundred and seventeen Access students that constitute the human

material of the study, the passengers in the vehicle, on the journey of their personal morphogenesis, which the thesis seeks to chart. Table One below provides a breakdown of age, gender and ethnicity; Table Two on pages 74-75, provides a breakdown of educational qualifications prior to applying to Access, and Table Three on pages 78-79, provides a breakdown of employment history prior to applying to Access.

**Table 1: All Students: Gender and Ethnicity by Age**

**Data collected 1992-94**

	Age							
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
White/ male	10	11	6	5	4	1	0	0
Black/ male	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total/ male	13	11	7	5	4	1	0	0
White/ female	15	14	13	10	7	5	0	1
Black/ female	6	1	1	3	0	0	0	0
Total/ female	21	15	14	13	7	5	0	1
Total	34	26	21	18	11	6	0	1

Total white male 37

Total black male 4

Total white female 65

Total black female 11

Total all students 117



The Tables chart statistically, where the students come from, their cultural beginning, reflecting as it does, their designated 'birth culture', about which they had no choice. Statistics tell us little about life, about culture, but do act as a first empirical foundation of sociological understanding, (which is crucial before any 'sociological imagination' can get under way). This is so because it reflects the social groups and collectivities to which we are all involuntarily ascribed at the moment of birth.

The quantitative picture of the students' gender, ethnicity and age (Table 1) reveals some significant cultural trends: firstly, that approximately two thirds of the total student population is female (64.96%) and one third male (35.04%). This gender division is typical of the Access programme at the College and may have much to do with the different opportunities and opportunity costs for women and men prior to enrolling on Access, i.e. the enhancements and restrictions of both the female, mother/housewife role and the male, breadwinner role in relation to the probability and possibility of personal change. (The importance of these issues is crucial to the thesis and is discussed in depth throughout the thesis, but especially in the 'Work Profiles' (Ch.4), the 'Personal Profiles' (Ch.5), 'Elective Affinities' (Ch.7) and in the Conclusion.

The second social feature of the students' social background is

the small number (12.82%) of black students on the Course and once again this figure is representative of the Access programme at the College (and Access nationally) apart from Access courses in certain areas purposely developed for black students. As I stated in the Introduction, 'the study could be re-formulated solely in terms of ethnicity and its accompanying issues' but given the 'limitations of the research format one has to pin one's butterfly to the board'. Nevertheless throughout the thesis, when looking at individual student biographies, I have indicated at all times their age, gender and ethnicity thereby providing the reader with a basic picture of their overall social stratification; the information meant to emphasise the cultural combinations of each life.

Furthermore since the research focuses on the importance of social class as the main cultural 'common denominator' the picture painted is one incorporating, by default, black **working class** women, white **working class** women, black **working class** men and white **working class** men. This argument of course begets other arguments (which beget further arguments), such as that old chestnut between sociologists about what constitutes social class, and the debates between Marxists and feminists on the significance of either social class or gender as the prime influence on people's lives, and from those involved in race issues, the significance of ethnicity in relation to either social class and/or gender. These issues are clearly too extensive to investigate within the limitations of the research

but need always to be in the mind of the reader as should the focus of the research, looking at people who never went to university via their formal school route, due (it will be argued) to the disadvantages of their ascribed cultural birth and their accompanying cultural thinking which may have meant they may not have desired to go anyway, but who now, as mature students, seek university entrance.

Thus, even lower than the lowest cultural 'common denominator', their working 'classness', is that what they never had structurally (a university education) nor perhaps what they ever desired culturally (a university education) is now something that is on offer via Access (structurally speaking), and something which they now want (biographically speaking). The question is why do they now want to go to university, what structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors have affected their decision? It will become apparent when reading through the students' 'Personal Profiles' (Ch.5) that their reasons for wanting to do Access, like the cultural common denominator of them not possessing a university degree, is also catalytic, namely the notion of change or/and crisis at work in their lives affecting significantly their desire to enter university.

Since the students themselves cited these life changes and crises as reasons on their application forms for deciding on Access, and that the issue of personal changes/crises appears

catalytic for the overwhelming majority, then the catalyst appears to cross gender and ethnic lines. This of course is not to deny that ethnicity, gender or social class had no affect on their lives nor their decisions, since the first base line of the research is that by being members of culturally disadvantaged collectivities the students may well have been denied a university education (or at least a non-problematic route to university) but that the core of the research is the students' reasons for deciding on Access; the catalytic trigger of change or crisis in their lives which now fires them into joining Access as a foundation for university entrance.

The third issue raised by the statistics in Table 1 is the age factor of the students. The main consideration here is the decreasing number of students in relation to their increasing age, the older they are the fewer they are. It would appear that there is a relationship between the age of mature students and the possibility of them deciding on Access, deciding on university. Clearly people from culturally disadvantaged groups, not possessing a university education, and for whatever reason(s) now desiring a university education, may make such a decision in relation to significant life change which may be more common and more catalytic during the years when their lives have not moved towards the cultural 'twilight zone' where although experiencing personal change the capacity for doing something about it may have diminished with the years. Put simply, it may be that a sixty year old working class person

may find it much more problematic, for a complexity of reasons, some obvious, to consider a university degree than say a thirty or forty year old from the same social group. As one of the Beynon's production line workers said regarding his financial commitments to his family and the possibility of working with people as opposed to things, 'There's no possibility now, like'. [Beynon, 1984: 124.] It may be that there are times in the lives of working class people when change or crisis provides the trigger for further more significant change and realisation of long held dreams, becoming a reporter, a teacher, a social worker, a people focussed career, but many boats may be missed over the years, due to opportunity costs, until there may indeed be a final, perhaps realistic, realisation that 'there's no possibility now'.

At the other end of the age continuum is the significance of how the number of students increases as their age range decreases, (nearly seventy per cent were under thirty five). This may bear relation to the discussion above to why so very few older students arrive on Access, that there is the 'time to make the move' and that time may have more compatibility with people whose lives have not yet entered what we could say is the 'last leg' of their socio-cultural journey. Thus, it may be much easier (though not easy) for younger working class people to take the 'Access plunge', since their lives may not have yet become meshed in the cultural entanglements of marriage, mortgages and money, thereby making more difficult

for them to change personal direction. Correspondingly it may be that after some years in their cultural milieux, a time of change or crisis in their personal lives provides them with both the instigation and the opportunity to make the move, such as children starting/settled at school in the former category and divorce or redundancy in the latter. That they are now in a position to take up the cultural chalice, that they desire to take up the cultural chalice, that the chalice (Access) is on offer structurally, is the crux of the research but must be understood not only in relation to their present and their desire to enter university but also in relation to their past and why they never went there earlier which must of course bear significance to their cultural and educational background.

Clearly, there is little to speak of in terms of educational qualifications. The statistics illuminate a culturally negative continuum. It is not only that the students do not possess A levels at all, as the traditionally accepted criteria for university entrance, but that the large majority do not possess O-Levels/GCSEs. Only twenty nine students registered having either O-Levels or GCSEs and thus although there were in total one hundred and five registered O-Level/GCSEs the distribution of these across the group would mean each student holding less than one each. With regards gender and O-Levels/GCSEs (and with CSEs) in all age bands the greater total is held by female students giving credence to feminist research that although working class girls often obtain more and better grades at

**Table 2: All Students: Educational Qualifications****Data collected 1992-94**

	Age											
	21-25		26-30		31-35		36-40		41-45		46-50	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
<b>CSEs</b>												
Art	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Biology	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Commerce.	0	1	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eng. Lang.	2	4	2	6	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
Eng. Lit.	1	2	0	6	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
French	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Geog.	0	3	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
History.	0	3	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
H. Econ.	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Maths.	2	6	2	3	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Needlework	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Social St.	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Typing.	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>0 level/GCSEs</b>												
Biology.	0	3	2	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chemistry.	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Commerce.	1	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cookery/Nutr.	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eng. Lang.	1	4	3	3	1	3	1	2	0	0	0	0

continued on next page:-

**Table 2: Educational Qualifications (continued)**

	Age											
	21-25		26-30		31-35		36-40		41-45		46-50	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
<b>0 level/GCSEs</b>												
French.	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
General St.	0	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Geography.	1	3	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
German.	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
H. Ecom.	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
History.	1	3	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Maths.	1	1	4	3	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
Physics.	1	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sociology.	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	8	25	18	22	3	12	2	5	0	0	0	0
<b>Pre-Technical</b>												
English	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Tech. Draw.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Commerce	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
<b>RSA</b>												
Eng. Lang	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Typing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Word Proc.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
<b>Cert. Ed</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0



school than boys the tendency is for them not to continue with their education due to the socialisation process and the desire for early marriage and children rather than a steady career. [Sue Sharpe's Just Like a Girl, 1981, is acknowledged as presenting a classic analysis of this situation.]

Whether working class girls or boys, the fact that many years on as working class women and men, and after many years out of the education system, that they now desire to enter university, can only be understood by considering what has happened to them in between leaving school with minimal educational qualifications and seeking to enter higher education. Clearly, something did happen, something very important, important enough to make them change cultural course. Thus, since not all people, indeed the vast majority from disadvantaged groups, seek to obtain a university degree then we can speculate that those who do have something specific about them which sets them apart from the generality. The specificity of their situation, may bear some relation to that which has happened to them in between obtaining minimal educational qualifications and their recent desire to enter higher education. In what ways then have their lives been different to others from the same disadvantaged social groups and has this had a bearing on why they chose to come on Access as a mechanism to enter higher education? The predictability of the path from their cultural starting point emphasises the unpredictability of the cultural diversion they are now attempting by seeking university entry.

A major aspect of the students' lives, their employment history, Table Three, suggests clearly that one predictable cultural thing did happen to them (two when considering lack of educational qualifications), namely undertaking menial, low status, semi-skilled work. The range of occupations cited by the students in their application forms, demonstrate that in relation to their work history and the Registrar-General's class categorization scale, the vast majority of the Access students have an overall 'occupational fit' with occupational classes, 3N, Skilled Occupations (Non-manual), 3M, Skilled occupations (Manual), 4 Partly Skilled Occupations, 5 Unskilled Occupations, 6, Armed Forces. Only three of the one hundred and seventeen students can be categorised in Occupational Class 2, (intermediate occupations), one teacher and two nurses. None can be categorised in Occupational Class One, (Professional Occupations), including accountants, doctors, lawyers. [O'Donnell, 1992: 121.]

Clearly the definition of what constitutes social class is still a contentious issue and not the brief of this research. Nevertheless, given their lack of educational qualifications, their low status employment history and their overall cultural situation in society, the Access students are in commonsense terms what one might reasonably refer to as 'working class'. There are no A levels, no degrees, no professional workers (with the exception of one, ex-primary school teacher holding the old two year Cert. Ed). Furthermore, on their application

forms, under the heading, 'PRESENT OCCUPATION, (IF ANY)', eighty seven of the students described themselves as unemployed.

**Table 3: All Students: Employment History**

**Data collected 1992-94**

	Age											
	21-25		26-30		31-35		36-40		41-45		46-50	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
<b><u>Job</u></b>												
Aerial Rig.	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Army.	-	-	-	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Bar work.	2	2	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	1
Building	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Build. Soc.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Care Atten.	1	6	3	2	-	2	-	4	-	-	-	1
Catering.	0	2	1	1	-	1	1	-	-	1	-	2
Chambermaid	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cleaning	-	1	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-
Clerical.	3	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	-	1	-	-
Door Sales.	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Driver.	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dry Clean.	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Engineer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Factory.	3	1	3	2	1	-	2	2	1	-	-	2
Floristry.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Foreign Leg.	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

continued on next page:-

**Table 3:      Employment History (continued)**

	Age											
	21-25		26-30		31-35		36-40		41-45		46-50	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Gardener.	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hairdresser.	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hol. Camp.	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hotel work	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Library Ass.	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Mechanic	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Nanny.	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Nursing	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Paint/Dec.	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
RAF	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Roadsweeper	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Post Off.	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Secretary.	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Sheetmetal	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Shop.	1	2	3	2	2	2	1	2	-	-	-	-
Sports.	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supermark.	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	3	-	1	-	-
Taxi Dr.	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Teacher	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Typing.	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-
Waitress.	-	2	-	1	-	3	-	1	-	-	-	-
Warehouse.	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Wind/Clea.	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The fact they are undertaking Access at all, as **mature** students rather than eighteen year olds, is some indication of their cultural starting place, their social class, and journey travelled. The number and range of jobs of the students, the occupational cul-de-sac that most found themselves in, is further evidence of their lack of educational qualifications, cultural starting point, and cultural somersault. Pat Davies draws our attention to an investigation by PCAS, 1993, in which 'a great deal of information about Access entrants was published for the first time'. [Davies, 1994:46.] Table Four, taken from Davies provides a breakdown of the social class of admissions through PCAS in the academic year 1992.

**Table 4**

**Social class of admissions to degrees through PCAS (1992)**

Entry Qual's	Social Class %						Total	
	I	II	IIIN	IIIM	IV	V	%	No.
A levels.	14.4	44.1	13.2	18.4	8.1	1.8	100	56,810
BTEC/ SCOTVEC	10.7	37.4	13.3	23.7	11.7	3.2	100	10,756
Access	8.5	35.1	17.1	23.9	12.2	3.2	100	3,948
Other	14.4	43.3	15.0	17.0	8.2	2.0	100	2,256
None	10.6	39.1	15.3	21.6	10.9	2.5	100	3,934
All	13.5	42.4	13.6	19.5	8.9	2.1	100	77,704

Source: PCAS (1993): K5 p.69. [Davies, 1994: 57.]

On the issue of what constitutes social class, Davies, like myself, and many others, (it seems no-one bar the most orthodox

of Marxists are prepared to stick their neck out nowadays) makes the proviso that 'there is no space here to rehearse the debates on this issue but (that) this method of classifying students is extremely problematic'. [Davies, 1994: 56.] Nevertheless, having taken the proviso on board Davies also concludes that:

... the Access students ... have the lowest proportions of social classes I and II and the highest proportion of social classes, IIIN, IIIM, IV, and V ... While all the caveats should be remembered, the numbers are small and the differences are therefore not dramatic, it is not unreasonable to claim that Access courses do seem to be delivering higher proportions of the social classes traditionally under-represented in higher education than do other entry routes, particularly A levels'. [Davies, 1994: 58.]

Davies's statement, 'it is not unreasonable to claim' in basic terms that Access students are predominantly from working class backgrounds, like my own statement above 'that the Access students, in terms of their overall cultural situation in society, their lack of educational qualifications, their low status employment history, are in commonsense terms what what one might reasonably refer to as "working class" ', does I think present a fair and honest social picture of the relationship between Access courses and working class people as the main participants, the spirit of which would only be contested by the most 'nit-picking' sociological mind of the 'abstracted empiricist' variety, in the 'grip of the methodological inhibition' intent on not not believing anything unless it is passed 'through the fine little mill of The Statistical Ritual'. [Mills, 1977: 83.]

The only other proviso I would make is that in comparison with the PCAS statistics, then, based on their occupational background presented in Table Three, it would appear to be the case that there are even less Access students in Social Class II and III and even more in Social Classes IIIN, IIIM, IV and V, which may be due to geographical differences, the PCAS national north and south statistics, in relation to Coventry as an industrial city in the Midlands.

The main consideration of course is that whoever Access students are, whatever sociological categories one places them into, they are not eighteen, they do not possess A levels, and they are seeking university entrance many years after most of the traditional A level entrants have completed their degree. From where they come to where they want to go, is the issue. Why their cultural direction has changed is the topic of the thesis.

People do not change lives willy nilly. Some change has usually occurred in the circumstances of their structural, cultural, familial, and biographical interplay. The two most frequent changes identified in the thesis are anticipated and non-anticipated change (crisis). The former is acknowledged as part of the person's cultural path, i.e. children settled in school, time for thinking about myself, time for change; the latter is not culturally anticipated for here the crisis model e.g.

divorce, physical illness, mental illness, redundancy, and change is as it were forced on the person.

In each of the two models, change and crisis, through a combination of cultural circumstances and personal intentions, the situation can be described as something approaching a state of 'personal anomie', with structural, cultural, familial factors affecting the biography equilibrium of the individual to different degrees. Whether the change is anticipated or non-anticipated, the result can mean that the person is travelling unknown cultural routes, leading to a cultural crossroads. To this end, the beginning of a new personal journey is often underway, when a decision is made to want to enter University. Such a decision, is momentous, by any standards, and goes totally against the cultural grain of the vast majority of working class people who enrol on Access. The thesis is concerned with the question of why such a decision was made. The cornerstone of the research is that such a decision constitutes a both an ending and a beginning in terms of the biographical story of the person undertaking such a journey.

In a further extract from an interview on his play, 'The Singing Detective', Potter talks about the problems breaking and rebuilding Marlow, his painful psoriasis, his alienating time in hospital, both combining to produce something new.

It is the illness which is the crisis. It is the illness which has stripped him, it's the Job part if you like. Without the



crisis, in dramatic terms it needed exactly that, that starting point of extreme crisis and no belief, nothing except pain, and a cry, and a hate, out of which were assembled the fantasies, and the fantasies became facts and the facts were memories, and the memories became fantasies and the fantasies became realities and all of them became him and allowed him to walk. [Potter. 1987]

And the answer to what it is that we are, amidst the morass of familial, cultural, and structural properties, and pressures to conform is found:-

Principally, by showing, or by attempting to assert how sovereign you are as an individual human being, if you know it. And that means contending with all the shapes, all the sort of half shapes, all the memories, all of the aspirations of your life. How they coexist, how they contradict each other; how they have to be disentangled as a human act, by you, yourself. This sovereign self beyond, behind all those selves that are being sold things, remains the other unique sovereign individual. [Potter, 1987: BBC2.]

Chapter Two seek to explore that riddle of all riddles, 'structure in agency' and 'agency in structure', and the interplay between the two. A process of 'garnering the clues' of the social story, the structural cultural back-drop, for understanding the story of those people wanting to go to University, the Access students. Beyond their working class background, their gender roles, their cultural birth(s) 'beyond all those selves that are being sold', as Potter puts it, 'remains the other sovereign individual', seeking realisation amidst a sea of structural and cultural troubles.

## CHAPTER TWO

### STRUCTURE AND AGENCY INTERPLAY: CULTURAL CHANGE

#### **Teenage Martian Werewolves, Sammy Davis Jnr and Sarahs Various**

I was a 'Teenage Martian Werewolf from Atlantis (TMWA)', or so many an American sci-fi movie of the 1950s would declare. The problem of course for the TMWA was that s/he/it was strolling through a small American mid-west town which was not inhabited to a large degree by TMWAs. From a Laingian perspective the person deemed mentally ill by the rest of us, faces many similar problems walking in a world of non-mentally ill inhabitants. For instance, if they fail to hold down a marriage, fail to hold down a steady job, fail to pay their bills on time and hear God's voice at bus-stops on Tuesday mornings, there is clearly something wrong with them. However, a Laingian re-framing of the situation could view the mentally ill person as the norm, and those who hold down a steady marriage, hold down a steady job, pay their bills on time and only talk to God in church on Sunday mornings, as having a real 'steady' problem.

The American entertainer, Sammy Davis Junior, used to declare, in similar vain to the sci-fi 50's titles, that he was, 'the only one-eyed Jewish Negro in America', turning his 'abnormality-combination' into a livelihood. Using one of the two main career outlets available for black people in the USA, entertainment or sport, he turned his disadvantage into an

advantage. Had he not done so, or rather had he not been lucky enough to do so, he may have found his lot with the majority of black people in the USA, failing in the education system, working in a poorly paid, dead end, manual job and living in a ghetto suburb in a deprived inner city area.

When I arrived at University in the Autumn of 1983, after completing a year on an Access course, I found myself to be very much a TMWA or from Davis's perspective a OEJN. My own three determining characteristics being that I was a mature working class male, (MWCM) in a land predominantly occupied by young middle class females, (usually called Sarah). The key point is that for the first time in my life I found myself in the minority. Previously I had worked in offices, factories or shops, culturally and socially fulfilling my MWCM title, with others, culturally and socially fulfilling their own.

Like Davis, I was able to turn my disadvantage to an advantage, like other working class mature students, using my life experience, my working 'classness', as a sure foundation for my sociology studies. This was made very much easier for me because more often than not the 'stuff' of what they taught us was the 'stuff' of my own culture. For three years at university I was introduced to book after book, study after study, on the lives of working class people. What they did in their spare time, what they did at work, how they voted, what television programmes they watched, what clothes they wore, why

they did not speak properly, why their health was poor, why they smoked, and of course **why they failed in the education system.**

As an Eleven-Plus failure in 1958 I was seemingly categorised as being better with my hands than my head. Cyril Burt should have seen how my shelves always slope, how my screws always go in crooked, how my wallpaper patterns never match, my notoriety of attempting to mend a gas leak with a roll of sellotape and he may well have reconsidered his dexterity/academic division. (I'm not necessarily doubting that I was not born with a good mind but I do take issue that I was born good with my hands, a point always missed in the critique of the hereditarians). No need to conjure up the hypothetical twins, just look at my pelmets but not too closely because they might fall on your head! Clearly, I could not fulfil the 'good with my hands bit,' neither could I get interested in football, in rugby, in boxing, in motor cars, in racing cars, in pubs, in beer, in engineering, in metal work or wood work at school. My maleness was just as much a let down as my handiness. I knew I was supposed to enjoy the former and be good at the latter.

If what I was supposed to be was the result of something biological, something had gone wrong. The genes did not reflect Black and Decker shapes, the chromosomes did not respond to the half-time whistle, the combustion engine had little affect on my masculine dynamism, my drive had no desire to drive! If what

I was supposed to be was the product of socialisation it had not worked as fully as it should have done.

It became apparent to me that whatever I was, part of it could not be helped. Part of me had been formed either biologically, socially, or by a combination of the two, with another part of me, 'ME', watching it all happen. My 'inner me' watched the 'outer me', sometimes more often than others. The times the 'inner me' looked out with greater scrutiny was more often than not the times when the 'outer me' was undergoing some kind of change, either desired or detested; when schooldays ended, when work started, when I left a job through boredom, when I was sacked, when redundancy came along, when I got married, when the kids came along, when I separated, when relationships ended, when a period of ill health ensued, when the cultural interplay between me and the rest did not seem to work as well as it did at other times, times of change or crisis, as is the case with many Access students.

### **Butterflies, Jars and Perspective Transformations**

It was as though society was a large glass jar, complete with plants, and occupied by butterflies. This was their world, the world they knew. If one day the cork lid of the glass jar was accidentally left off and one butterfly inadvertently flew out, it would find itself on the outside looking in at the rest of the butterflies and the world it used to occupy with them. From such a point nothing can ever be the same again. To stay

outside is to face a total unknown, to return to the security, the safety of the jar would mean closing the mind off to what had been seen. Once on the outside it is impossible to return to the inside for the outside becomes the new inside.

I have used the 'butterfly out-of-the-jar' analogy many times with many mature student groups and they always relate very intensely to their understanding of the issues involved in the relationship between structure and agency. Their response in terms of relating to the butterfly analogy is in a word, overwhelming. Even more so since, as working class people, the very fact of being on an Access course, due to change or crisis, rather than in a factory, office or shop, due to stability and security, means they may be more 'outside people' than 'inside people'.

The core of the research sets out to investigate at what particular points in people's lives the cork lid was somehow left off for a time, a very crucial time, a time of transformation, a time when they became 'outside people'. The cork lid being left off the glass jar can be paralleled with those times in life when biographical/cultural change occurs, marriage, divorce, leaving school, starting work, redundancy, children starting school; the changes and crises that fuse endings and beginnings, activating in the process new beginnings, that is students arriving on Access.

In his studies of developing critical thinking in adult education, the Canadian educationalist, Jack Mezirow has spoken of 'perspective transformation', where an individual facing a sudden crisis in their life situation is forced, by the very severity of the change, to take stock of their life, since previous perspectives no longer hold true in relation to what has happened to them. He accepts that no-one's life is problem or change free and that people have to cope with all manner of changes and adjustments throughout their life. However, sometimes a change occurs which cannot be dealt with under the umbrella of past life experience. This leads the individual to a perspective transformation, where they cannot fall back on the old and are forced to create the new, in order to survive the crisis they face. As Mezirow states:-

Such dilemmas are commonplace in adult lives, but some are more dramatic than others. Examples are found in what popular writers have referred to as 'life crises.' The sudden loss of a mate or a job, a change of residence, graduation from college, betrayal or rejection, and scores of less significant inter-personal encounters as well as rapidly changing behavioural norms can create social or personal problems for which there are no ready made answers. [Mezirow, 1978: 101.]

Mezirow believes there are two main paths to perspective transformation, the first is of a crisis kind, what I have referred to as 'non-anticipated life changes' where, 'One has a sudden insight into the very structure of cultural and psychological assumptions which has limited or distorted one's understanding of self and one's relationships.' [Mezirow, 1981: 7.] The other is of a change kind, what I refer to as

'anticipated life changes', Mezirow terms a 'evolutionary personal history' which occurs 'by a series of transitions which permit one to revise specific assumptions about oneself and others until the very structure of assumptions becomes transformed.' [Mezirow, 1981: 7-8.] Thus the:-

... anomalous situation creating a disorientating dilemma may be the result of a more evolutionary personal history in which circumstances, like the prospect of an empty nest, makes a woman increasingly receptive to changing social norms, regarding women's roles or internalized rigidities constraining her from becoming autonomous.' [Mezirow, 1981: 8.]

For Mezirow one answer lies in adult education. Within this context he sees the development of critical thinking as the catalyst in helping the individual to understand their moment. He cites consciousness raising educational movements amongst women's groups and black groups to illustrate his point. Using the work of Freire as a prime example of what education can do in terms of consciousness raising, he writes ... 'Freire not only identifies development of a critical consciousness as a prerequisite for liberating personal development and social action, but he casts adult education in the role of catalyst.' [Mezirow, 1981: 103.]

It is debatable whether education should cast itself in such a role, since there is a thin line to be drawn, if any line at all, between social liberation and social engineering, no matter how good are the intentions of the educators. There can be a spontaneity of involvement between the educators and the



educated in terms of consciousness raising moments, particularly so in the social sciences, but when this takes on properties of formulated intervention in the student's life, then we are in to a different ball game.

The other issue which Mezirow fails to investigate is the circumstances under which the so-called 'perspective transformation' he identifies, occurs. What happens to people before returning to education as mature students is crucial to our understanding of what happens in terms of critical thinking development when they do return to education. The thesis is concerned with just this issue, personal change/crisis within the conformity of working class life, directing a person towards middle class academia, university entrance. The question is why? Why in general terms would such 'troubled souls' turn to formal education for their answers in the first place? One would have thought that when a person's life is in tatters, so to speak, the last thing they would want to do is enrol on an intensive course of study at their local college. In more specific cultural terms, the question is heightened further in relation to working class people, who, having an abysmal experience of school education now desire radically to re-enter the educational fray, by seeking university entry.

Crucially then he does not address the significance of the story line in relation to time and place and the compatibility, the push/pull properties of 'elective affinity', between

availability of new cultural ideas, and the changing ideas of social groups/individuals experiencing change and/or crisis in their lives.

These two issues, the notion of crisis and change, seemingly propelling people towards education is what the thesis will seek to answer. After all if we return to the analogy of a butterfly out of a jar, on the outside looking in, the alarmed state it may experience hardly seems conducive to popping along to 'Butterfly College' to see what's on offer. Most of us face problematic moments in our lives when the straight-line becomes zig-zagged, when we question the set-up around us, our family, our relationships, our friends, our work, but most of us do not go to college to find answers. Canadian educationalist, Stephen Brookfield, draws our attention to the Alexandre Report on Scottish adult education in 1975, which maintained that ...

There are many adults in all walks of life who have acquired the capacity to maintain the process of self-education through reading and discussion, through selective viewing and listening, through travel and by many other means, without the need to participate in any form of organised educational programme. [Brookfield, 1983: 1.]

Brookfield sees the answer to the divide between formal and informal learning processes as being the redressing of the basic institutionalised role of teachers towards a more equal learning relationship, thus releasing the sharing and transmission of knowledge from 'the shackles and imbalances of ... institutionalised structures or conventions'. [Brookfield, 1983: 1.]

### **Remedies; good intentions, insurmountable structures**

Thus Mezirow identifies 'perspective transformation' and calls for the development of critical thinking in education as a catharsis for such people coming to terms with their new reality; Brookfield identifies prior life-learning and calls for the acknowledgement of the same as the cornerstone of lecturer-student learning processes. The problem of course is that such well intentioned and liberally progressive attitudes take little account of social structure and the cultural life experience of people within that structure. The temporal interplay between structure, culture and the biographical experience of the individual must be the first line of any understanding for both teacher and student alike, and of the relationship that exists between them, **as it must be for any sociological theory and accompanying social research that portrays a 'realist' picture of structure and agency.**

Education is a social structure, for some, an insurmountable social structure that influences to a very large degree their life chances and life quality. But education itself is part of the honeycomb of the societal hive and it itself is in turn affected by other social structures, family life, industry, economic systems, religion, political systems and so on and so forth. People's biographical and cultural experience of the temporal accumulation of social structures will also affect their experience of singular social structures, such as education. An individual's experience in the classroom at

school cannot be fully understood without consideration of the same individual's experience of the front room at home. Durkheim's insistence on understanding one social fact only in relation to another can be translated from its extreme positivist interpretation to a pure phenomenological one, you can only understand one social construct in relation to another, or from a Laingian perspective you can only understand one experience only in relation to another.

That experiential impression will be based on the cultural subjectivity of the groups we are part of, our social class, our gender, our ethnicity, our religion, our age grouping, for instance, and any combinations of the same. In essence that which divides us, our cultural social grouping can be that which unites us, our experience of knowing that we are part of a socio-cultural grouping, knowing that others are part of a socio-cultural grouping, acknowledging our cultural differences and similarities and their effects on our lives. As Laing points out:-

And we are separated and joined by our different perspectives, educations, backgrounds, organisations, group loyalties, affiliations, ideologies, socio-economic class interests, temperaments. These social 'things' that unite us are by the same token so many things, so many social figments that come between us. But if we could strip away all the exigencies and contingencies, and reveal to each other our naked presence? If you take away everything, all the clothes, the disguises, the crutches, the grease paint, also the common projects, the games that provide the pretexts for the occasions that masquerade as meetings - if we could meet, if there were such an happening, a happy coincidence of human beings, what would now separate us? [Laing, 1990: 33.]

Probably our existential being devoid of structural cultural form and influence. The key issue though is that we do live in a structured society comprising many different cultural groupings and as Laing so rightly highlighted above, these not only unite us but also come between us. Thus, in his most famous of statements when he writes:

I see you, and you see me. I experience you, and you experience me. I see your behaviour. You see my behaviour. But I do not and never will see your experience of me. Just as you cannot 'see' my experience of you. You cannot experience my experience. We are both invisible men. All men are invisible to one another. [ Laing: 1990, 15-16.]

All in all, I think he has got it right in terms of the singularity, the isolation of the experience of living, irrespective of our social groupings, but an even more important statement is surely that, 'I know that you experience and you know that I experience'. So, although we cannot experience each other we do know that we each experience. And from knowing that we both experience we can discuss what we experience. What we experience at a very important level is society. We may find that some of our experiences are the same or similar, whilst others may be different or dissimilar, but we can compare and contrast structural and cultural notes. We may find a 'sameness' in our 'social classness', both being middle class or both being working class. We may find that 'sameness' is differentiated by its gender properties, we may both be working class but you may be man and I may be woman. Conversely we may both be women, this is our 'sameness', but

you may be working class and I may be middle class, our gender 'sameness' thus bisected by our social class difference.

Thus, what both you and I experience, not you and I directly in this instance, but from where our experience derives, the collectivities to which we all belong, means that we have an experiential basis for discussion. You experience social structures, you experience cultural identities, you experience the freedoms and restrictions of each, you experience the advantages and disadvantages of each. Likewise so do I. My experience may not be the same as your experience depending on who I am in terms of my structural-cultural time and place, and the collectivities of which I am part, but our experiences derive from the same place, society.

Thus, whilst agreeing with Laing's emphasis on the individuality of experiential self, I believe he should have emphasised more, much more, the generality of experience of society, of collectivities, of mutual cultural experience. That seems the only logical starting point for us to begin perhaps to be really fully aware of what society does to us, and by us, thus providing a possible basis for beginning, as Laing, says, for taking away, 'the grease paint', 'the common projects', the games' and move closer to 'a happy coincidence of human beings'. There do not seem to be any short cuts to freedom, unstructuredness only comes by acknowledging structure. We are born into other people's ideas and institutions, some living,

some dead, and our ideas and actions will help shape the structure and culture of it all, and other people will be born into our ideas and institutions in turn.

### **Structural conditioning; cultural reaction**

A person is born into a lot, an awful lot. Within seconds of arrival on the planet they are given a whole range of social roles, prescribed at the time of entry, a mantle of living, for many, until the day of departure, bound within the role identities of their cultural grouping(s), working class, middle class, male, female, etc. In broad terms it is not so much the case that girls will be girls, that boys will be boys, but more that girls will be expected to be girls, boys will be expected to be boys, women will be expected to be women, men will be expected to be men, housewives will be expected to be housewives, fathers will be expected to be fathers, working class will be expected to be working class, middle class will be expected to be middle class. It is difficult to go against the social grain.

Access students are indeed doing just that, going against the the social grain, against their cultural grouping, by their desire to enter higher education. Personal change can lead to Mezirow's 'perspective transformation', though it should be emphasised, not only from the point of view of the person undergoing the experience, but also from the perspective of the

cultural onlookers, familiar cultural acquaintances, of the 'old cultural order' (working class family and friends) and unfamiliar acquaintances of the 'new cultural order', (young middle class students). Significant personal and cultural change can lead to significant personal and cultural re-definitions, adjustments and commitments, of a very complex order for all of those involved in the situational 'drama' (and its socio-cultural backdrop) which I refer to as 'the ripple effect' (discussed further in the Conclusion).

#### **Situational Adjustments and Commitments; Becker's conditions for personal change**

Howard S. Becker, looking at 'Personal change in adult life', identifies, 'situational adjustment', a catalyst for personal change and 'situational commitment', a catalyst for personal staticity, as the two main socio-cultural scenarios prompting or inhibiting personal change. Regarding 'situational adjustment' Becker writes:

The person, as he moves in and out of a variety of social situations, learns the requirements of continuing in each situation and of success in it. If he has a strong desire to continue, the ability to assess accurately what is required, and can deliver the required performance, the individual turns himself into the kind of person the situation demands ... If we view situational adjustment as a major process of personal development, we must look to the characteristics of the situation for the explanation of why people change as they do ... All we need to know of the person is that for some reason or another he desires to continue his participation in the situation or to do well in it ... The perspectives a person acquires as a result of situational adjustments are no more stable than the situation itself or his participation in it. Situations occur in institutions: stable institutions provide stable situations in which little change takes place. When the institutions themselves change, the situations they provide for their participants shift and necessitate development of new



patterns of belief and action ... Situational adjustment is very frequently not an individual process at all, but a collective one. That is, we are not confronted with one person undergoing change but an entire cohort, a 'class' of people, who enter the institution and go through its socialization program together ... But situational adjustment may have a collective character even where people are not processed in groups. The individual enters the institution alone, or with a small group, but joins a larger group there already, who stand ready to tell him how it is and what he should do. [Becker, 1971: 59-60.]

Whilst agreeing partly with Becker's analysis, he seems to straightjacket his clearly interactional approach within the confines and social interaction of the formal institution, the high school, the medical school, the work place, without addressing society as an institution, as a whole. **The most significant and controlling of our institutions are those that are designated at birth,** long before we enter the culturally reflective brick and mortar establishments, the school, the factory, the university.

So when Becker states that 'When the institutions themselves change, the situations they provide for their participants shift and necessitate development of new pattern of belief and action', we can apply the journeys of the Access students, crisis and change through marital breakdown, redundancy, children starting school. The key issue is that these 'situational adjustments' must be understood within the wider, structural, cultural position of the person, for instance that working class life may be less stable than middle class life and more prone to change from wider structural changes

unemployment, poverty etc. This takes on further importance when Becker goes on to discuss 'situational commitment' where the possibility of change is restricted rather than enhanced. Becker identifies, 'situational commitment' as a time when people display consistency in their lives, deciding against significant personal change. He writes:

Briefly we can say a person is committed when we observe him pursuing a consistent line of activity in a sequence of varied situations ... even though the actor may engage in a variety of disparate acts, he sees them as essentially consistent; from his point of view they serve him in pursuit of the same goal. Finally, it is a distinguishing mark of the commitment that the actor rejects other situationally feasible alternatives, choosing from among the available courses of action that which best suits his purpose. In doing so he often ignores the principle of situational adjustment, pursuing his consistent line of activity in the face of a short-term loss. [Becker, 1971: 61.]

Clearly, within 'situational commitment', the person is weighing up the odds of attempting change, but as with the change category, 'situational adjustment', Becker, does not place the situation within an overall structural cultural perspective. Thus culturally disadvantaged groups and collectivities, working class people, women, ethnic minorities etc., have far more limited opportunities for personal change and far more opportunity costs to consider. The structural restrictions and limitations of their cultural position(s) will severely limit the possibility of movement. Becker's theory is useful to our understanding of change or staticity in personal life, but due to his Interactionist perspective, he limits the scope of his approach, failing to take account of cultural differences and

similarities between people, which can either restrain or enhance both possibilities for 'situational adjustment' and/or 'situational commitment'.

Becker's interactionist explanation of personal change, as with Mezirow's and Brookfield's, or the 'free-schooling' approach, is not too dissimilar from some of the more applied research into reasons for people joining Access courses, although it must be emphasised that the perspectives of the three, look decidedly reasonable and 'meaty' when compared to the shallowness of actual research in the field.

**Other literature; lack of sociological analysis, lack of morphogenesis.**

A review of the existing literature, of recent research trends concerning why Access students become Access students, was illuminating (though not surprising) **not due to what they discovered but by revealing the perspective from which they attempted to do the discovering.** As one would expect, educational research of a more specific and applied kind was found to be well and truly the domain of the educationalists and the psychologists, rather than the sociologists. Thus, the research literature is a minefield of specialist educational theories emanating from people working in the area of adult education, very much in the pathological 'model mode' of identifying such and such people as exhibiting such and such behavioural traits, in relation to the 'meaningful' and 'situational' 'context' of such and such scenarios, devoid of

sociological analysis, often slipping into psychologism, replete with diagnosis of inadequacies and a ready supply of pedagogical remedies.

The influence of American writers is very significant and influential in the area of 'adults returning to study' and all of the main theory 'models' seem largely of American origin. Veronica McGivney, [1990] identifies some of the main contenders: 'Needs hierarchy theory', [Miller, 1967], 'Congruence Model', [Boshier, 1971], 'Force-field theory', [Rubenson, 1977], 'Life transitions theory' [Aslanian and Bricknell, 1980], 'Reference group theory', [Darkenwal and Merriam 1988], 'Social participation model', [Courtney, 1981], 'Chain of response model', [Cross, 1981], 'Psychosocial interaction model', [Darkenwal and Merriam, 1982], 'Recruitment paradigm', [Rubensen, 1977]. The list is almost self-explanatory, self-descriptive, and one could hazard a 'meaningful' guess at where each is coming from. It seems likely that the pre-occupation with meaningful interaction, situational meaning, and the like has its origins in the overall pre-occupation with the psychological, the interactional and the ethnomethodological.

So really the field is not so much a minefield as a 'mind-field', emphasising personal attributes or rather lack of them and the immediacy of the social situation both in terms of person and place, more often than not, the diagnostic pre-

occupation providing a tailor-made pedagogy, a coat of many meaningful colours, awaiting the unaware 'non-participant' as they enter the 'institute of adult education'.

In this sense the approaches seem to have something of a hangover effect of cultural deprivation theories and accompanying compensatory education movements of the 1960s, apparently forgetting the abysmal failure of the educationalists' interventionist strategies on both sides of the Atlantic, then, they seek to apply an updated model or models, now. One wonders where they had gone, but here they are, back again, wearing the same interventionist garb, re-emerging from their institutes, with new diagnoses for old problems. The new emphasis seems to be, 'let's not start with the culture this time, we got it wrong last time, let's start with the individual, **not so much 'Head Start' as 'Start Head', approaches**, cultural emphasis now replaced by the personal and the situational.

Reviewing the existing educational theories of why people return to study, Norwegian educationalist, Paul Gooderham, states:

The models of recruitment that have been developed in adult education research have largely been interactionist in character **drawing their inspiration more from psychology than sociology in that personal characteristics assume a central position** (Nordhaug, 1983). Cross (1982) has developed a chain-of-response model which seeks to synthesize the theorizing that has thus far taken place regarding voluntary participation in adult education. It spans the work of Boshier (1973), Rubenson (1977), and Tough (1979). The three fundamental components of

the model have their basis in the individual: self-evaluation, attitudes about education, and importance of goals and expectations that participation will meet goals. One criticism of giving such a model a psychological base when it in reality seeks to explain a social action is that the sociological dimension is relegated to secondary status. **Social pressures that condition these psychological variables are neglected.** [Gooderham, 1987: 141.]

While in complete agreement with Gooderham's assessment of the situation, (the emphasis is mine), he then attempts to slip into the sociological, making it almost non-sociological, or at the best, base-sociological. As with many 'educationalists' who take those first tentative steps into the very deep waters of sociology, the educationalist slip often still shows, as they skirt the sociological issues, using material that would not come amiss in a GCSE project. Thus, Gooderham identifies himself as a member of the 'reference group theory model', which seeks to explain 'non-participants' now choosing to 'participate in post school education' in the following manner:

The phenomenon that reference group seeks to account for is that while on the one hand people "act in a social frame of reference yielded by the groups of which they are part ... there is however, the further fact that ... (they) frequently orient themselves to groups other than their own in shaping their behaviour and evaluations" (Merton, 1957, p. 233). This distinction between membership and non-membership groups is one that becomes more important as a society's rate of social mobility increases (Mitchell, 1968) and the possibility of belonging to new groups becomes stronger. [Gooderham, 1987: 142.]

So the basis of the more sociological 'reference group theory' approach, critical of the predominant psychological approach of educationalists, is to be found in the work of Functionalist, Robert Merton, and Mitchell, who from Gooderham's bibliography

I found wrote, 'A dictionary of sociology', 1968. I am not seeking to satirize Gooderham's research, since from most I have read in the field, his is one of the few that seems to have a basis of genuine understanding of cultural properties affecting why people move from one cultural, ideational, base to another. What I am highlighting, is that educationalists have a long, long way to go, on any newly found sociological trail, but at least its a start.

So reviews of existing literature in the field, yielded little in the sense of sociological analysis. Article after article after article in specialist adult education type weeklies, monthlies, quarterlies, half-yearlies, featured protagonists fencing with model comparisons in the next available issue, and the next available issue, and ...

The issue of course is that certain specialisms, through the morphogenesis of their own formation and continued reason for existence, have tended to 'corner the academic market' of this area or that area, educationalism being a classic example, with adult educationalism being a morphogenetic offshoot of the main specialist plant. Thus we not only have outer-disciplinary debates between that discipline or this discipline, sociology versus psychology for instance, but also inter-disciplinary debates between, that perspective and this perspective, Marxism versus Functionalism, or in the adult education arena, Force-field Theory versus Reference Group Theory. [For a

morphogenetic analysis on the socio-cultural processes involved in the development of such specialisms, see Archer, 1992, especially Ch. 8. p.p. 248-253.]

The problem for a sociologist entering the fray of the 'educationalist specialism' of adult education, and what motivates 'non-participants' to become 'participants', is that in terms of sociological analysis of such issues, the ground is pretty thin to say the least. One issue that did strike me was the very terminology frequent in the specialism, such as the phrase '**non-participant adults**' occurring again and again, as a standard 'model' description of the group in question, which is then followed by an explanation of why non-participant groups suddenly become participant groups. I believe there is some mileage to be gained from this regarding contrasts with the basis of my own research, a morphogenetic understanding of people's lives in relation to a morphogenetic understanding of the structural and cultural environment under which personal change is experienced.

### **Non-participant groups in post-school education**

In the Introduction to her research for the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), Veronica McGivney opens with the following: 'Large sections of the population **do not voluntarily engage** in any forms of learning after school. The **non-participation** issue, as it has been termed, has long been a matter of concern in this country and throughout the industrial



world'. [McGivney, 1990: 1.] (The emphasis is mine.) The question of being a non-participant in any aspect of society, relates not solely to the decision 'voluntary to engage in', 'freely to choose', but also and more so, to cultural factors, often inherited at birth, or rather bequeathed by others. The point is that people do not 'voluntarily engage' in, do not chose to become 'non-participants' or 'participants' in many aspects of society, let alone university, for more often than not, most participant or non-participant social groupings, are given to us **at the point of leaving the womb, not the point of entering the university.** In other words excessive voluntarism characterizes those like McGivney: the problem is not to replace it by an equally excessive social determinism.

The most important of these ascribed groups, social class, gender and ethnicity, have **enforced enrolment procedures at birth, and such groups as we are culturally initiated into as 'participants', will by default make us 'non-participants' in others groups;** by being born a 'participant' of the working class, you are a 'non-participant' of the middle class, by being born a 'participant' of female gender, you are a 'non-participant' of male gender. Thus, the tendency of many of the adult education theories is to start off from a perspective of **seeing Access students as 'non-participant' groups in higher education, when the first question really should be 'what groups do they participate in'.** The latter then can provide the basis for understanding why they now wish to participate in a

part of society, university education, that previously would have seen them as a 'non-participant'; somewhere along the way, ideas have changed, and for working class people seeking university entry, changed significantly.

University education, represents the tip of the cultural iceberg, an ideational creation, culturally compatible, and historically traceable, through a morphogenetic analysis, with those whose ideas it epitomises, the middle class. Yet a century ago they too would have been seen by today's educationalists as 'non-participant adults', since a university education was very much the domain of the upper class, the landed aristocracy. Since no such thing as Access Courses were available at the time, the middle class used substitution and started their own brand of education, compatible with their own cultural and structural needs. [See Archer, 1979, and Johnson, 1976.] Indeed, the working class did themselves attempt early substitutional strategies, which were overcome by the cultural power base of the main protagonists in the educational struggle, the upper and middle classes. As Johnson states:-

So how was it to be got? How were radicals to educate themselves, their children, their class, within the cramping limit of time, leisure and income which all in various degrees they shared? The key answer for this period was by their own collective educational enterprises. The key strategy was substitutional. They did it themselves ... (but) ... despite the innovation of the 1830s the real material space that counter-education had occupied was shrinking ... Working class activists began to demand educational provision through the state ... Though there were moments ... when the practical-agitation route was re-discovered, most working class agitation (or agitation on behalf of the class) was directed towards

securing benefits through the state apparatus itself. [Johnson, 1976: 20]

Now already just by looking, in the briefest of terms, at the educationalists' terminology of 'non-participant adults', we are already forming the basis of a morphogenetic analysis and understanding of events, (or rather of temporal- cyclical movement based on the socio-cultural interaction of opposing cultural groupings as protagonists in the educational arena.) I hope the point has been made, for to pursue the point further in any in-depth analysis of the asociological, a-morphogenetic approach of most of the 'adult educationalists' would constitute a thesis in its own right.

Thus, what was **once substitutional and designed by themselves and for themselves, is now institutional, and designed for the working class by others like the adult educationalist.** In broader terms such an argument could be directed to all education for working class people, including compulsory schooling as working class children and 'voluntary' education as working class adults, in that whatever is taught is both reflective and supportive of middle class culture and middle class structural power. [Bernstein, 1960, Bourdieu, 1973] One may speculate that if primary and secondary education were given the 'voluntary' status of adult education, then by definition the C band and some of the B band may disappear by unilateral cultural declaration, leaving the A band largely

intact, although this may have more to do with middle class parental pressure than 'voluntary engagement' of middle class pupils, if Willis's 'no-hopers' and Hargreaves C streamers are to make sense in the former case and Boudon's 'positional theory' is correct in the latter.

So when McGivney says 'large sections of the population do not voluntarily engage in any forms of learning after school', the statement begs a lot, not least the cultural interactive morphogenesis of our education system, the resulting structural elaboration of the system itself, and the cultural elaboration of the groups engaged in the nineteenth century educational battleground. Discussing the historical development of our state education system and the interplay between structural, cultural and biographical factors Huw Beynon states:-

Regularly, and with some feeling, I heard men complain of being treated 'nothing better than a number' by the Company. They resented it, and all the implications that, as line workers, they weren't capable of thought: 'thickos', failures at school, established in their station on the moving line. Here the mass production of vehicles and the mass production of workers through the school system came together. The new meritocratic education system (still powerful in its biases against working-class children) legitimized 'success' while making the judgement of 'failure' more total. As these arrangements developed so did 'working-class values'- the culture, behaviour and standards of working class people came to be seen as a primary block upon educational achievement. [Beynon, 1984: 20.]

It is within this context that provision for so-called 'non-participants' in higher education needs to be understood. The situation is by no means static, culturally or structurally, for some adult education is now being provided on something

less than a 'voluntary basis' for working class people, the various 'work training courses' for the unemployed, where failure of attendance results in reduction or loss of benefits; compulsory adult education for 'non-participants'?

Thus given that most researchers in the field of adult education draw 'their inspiration more from psychology than sociology', then the 'models' we find will be variants on the theme. Thus in terms of sociological comparison the field is grim, and since the thesis is not only sociological, but dealing and identifying with one of the two most recent sociological theories, morphogenesis (the other being structuration theory) then by definition the standard material found within research in the adult education arena will be even further removed from such an approach. Thus where one discipline may be starting to move towards a very basic sociological stance, Gooderham's use of Merton and Mitchell's 'Sociology Dictionary', then the other has not stood still in time, and whether Parsons, Merton, Althusser, Habermas, Becker or Lemert, they are under pressure like never before. Thus, regarding the 'litmus test' issue, the relationship between structure and agency, Archer states:-

Provision of a promising solution to this central problem is now accepted by many as a kind of litmus paper: theories which fail the acid test do effectively cede any claim to provide the framework for general theory. (For example to find that some approach is wholly deterministic, entirely objectivistic, or exclusively microscopic is ground enough for ceasing to consider it as a serious claimant. [Archer, p. x. 1992])

### **Life transition theories**

Thus, far from consideration of structural, cultural, familial and biographical details, the tendency of the spirit of the research in adult education, concentrates on the last of the list and gives little if any consideration to the combined effects and even more importantly, cyclical morphogenetic interplay of the three former factors. Even those studies, termed 'life transition theories', which find that the decision to participate frequently coincides with changes in life circumstances, **tend to be situational, personal and sudden, rather than structural, cultural and morphogenetic**, for instance [Aslanian and Bricknell 1980], [Webb, Williams, Green and Thompson, 1994].

Whilst acknowledging the statistical importance of such research findings, that personal change is a significant factor in the decision of people to undertake adult education courses, the tendency is not to follow the pattern through a sociological analysis, let alone a morphogenetic one. Thus, Aslanian and Bricknell findings that 'over 80% of of a large American sample were learning because their lives were changing in some way', [McGivney, 1990: 27.] and Webb et al, [1994: 213.] that 'the overwhelming impression from the interviews was the importance of chance factors, of unpredictable events', prove the statistical point so-to-speak that personal change is a key issue. For of the one hundred and seventeen Access students, in 'Journeys', the research findings indicate that

nearly three quarters of them had or were experiencing significant personal change or crisis in their lives at the time of enrolling on Access.

However, this agreement on the statistical evidence is where the thesis then parts company with the life transition theories, since what needs reiterating is that this 'is not the main point' of the research. Thinking back to the first page of the Introduction, as already has been made clear, 'the use of an Open Access Course is the methodological vehicle for a theoretical analysis of the interplay between structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors' and how they affect people's decisions. So in this sense, even the extremely important issue of change and crisis, identified by this and other research, is not the issue, but rather that such factors can only be understood through a morphogenetic analysis, of structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors.

Thus, the main contention of the thesis is that there is a personal morphogenesis at work in the lives of the Access students, identified primarily by changing ideas precipitated by personal life changes, but that this can only be understood in relation to their cultural starting point, their working 'classness', and the total reversal of that culturally bequeathed and conditioned beginning, by their decision, their choice to seek university entry, going completely against their cultural grain.

The decision to undertake Access, represents, not only an 'ending', but also a 'new beginning'. The notion of change or crisis identified in the study, is the 'trigger' for such cultural movement, but even the 'trigger' can only be understood in relation to the full mechanism of the pistol, and the firing mechanism. Concentration on the trigger is not enough, for although it pinpoints the moment of cultural and personal transition, and the moment of application to Access, crisis and change can only be understood in relation to what went before, presumably non-crisis, non-change life situations, or change that was not significant enough to facilitate an application to join an Access Course.

The main contention does not simply relate to the question of working class inequality in the education system, but to the structural/cultural morphogenesis of how such a situation occurred; the main enquiry here is not just about the issue of crisis or change triggering working class people to seek university entrance, but the personal/cultural morphogenesis that lead to such an ideational elaboration. The main proposition is that the issue of working class people deciding on university now, can only be understood in relation to why not university before, which does not relate to personal change or crisis alone, for middle class people must have changes/crises in their lives but do not decide on university, quite simply because they have probably already been there, as part of their culturally expected path. Thus the end cannot be



seen as a change or crisis, but a change or crisis related to cultural position, or more so the effects of crisis on a individual's cultural path.

Personal change involves decision making, decision making involves a sense of 'elective affinity', elective affinity in its logical interpretation, involves push-pull factors, and that push-pull scenario can only be understood in relation to the cultural composition of society, the complexities and contradictions, found within the socio-cultural interplay of advantaged and disadvantaged groups and the changing ideational situation they generate by their interaction. Personal change is obviously experienced by the individual, but since 'no individual is an island', then personal change is experienced by the individual within society, and since society comprises many different and changing cultural groups, then personal change is experienced within the individual, within society, within the individual's cultural grouping. Now, in the fullest possible socio-cultural scenario, such a situation may be occurring to many different individuals or groups at any given historical moment, and the complexity of the situation can only be sorted out and understood, by identifying the morphogenetic properties, of each biographical, cultural or structural story, depending on what social entity of either macro or micro scope the researcher is engaged in.

Of course since no person is an island, then an understanding of wider social properties in the morphogenetic sense is necessary, to fully understand the changing biographical drama in relation to the changing structural environment in which each and every life story is played out. However, society or rather structural properties are also not islands unto themselves, and the changing structural properties of society can be understood in relation to the changing cultural plot which determine to a large degree the structural environment of the society in which the individual's personal biography is played out. There are clear connotations here regarding the 'house that Jack built' relationship between structure, culture and biography.

Life transition theories tend to look at what is happening to the person, personal change, without looking at who the person is, socio-culturally speaking, and thus what is happening to them and what they have decided to do about it, or rather what they can do about it within their cultural position is not addressed. Similarly those studies which find that working class people are the most likely occupants of Access places, [Corrigan, 1992], tend to look at who the person is, culturally speaking, without looking what is happening to them biographically speaking, and thus what is happening to them and what they have decided to do about it or rather what they can do about it within their cultural position is not addressed. Life transition theories as explanations of why people join

Access courses, are poor substitutes for morphogenetic explanations of biographical change, and similarly structural explanations of why people join Access, are poor substitutes for morphogenetic explanations of structural, cultural and biographical interplay over time.

What we have here, are educationalist versions of psychologism (upwards conflationism), and structuralism (downwards conflationism). In each case we have part story, and part story, which if we believe it to be the whole story, can only be a distorted story. Looking through umpteen educational explanations of why people join Access, it becomes blatantly obvious that educationalists are facing the same problems of analysis as sociologists with regard the issue of structure and agency, though in much less critically analysed research, with a frightening tendency to apply their findings directly to the inhabitants of Access courses.

Some seem to have got close but then somehow fail to see the wood for the trees. For instance, when Webb et al, in a major large scale research of seven higher education institutions conclude:-

That the overwhelming evidence from the interviews was the importance of chance factors, of unpredictable events, of being in the right place at the right time, by accident. We have drawn the conclusion that to some extent all alternative and Access entrants are outside of any 'track' to higher education until they meet the right people in the right place to guide them and advise' [Webb et al., p.213., 1994]

They fail to address the issue of why people find compatibility with the moment when it arrives (if indeed that is to do with chance at all). Their emphasis on 'chance', on 'accident', on 'unpredictable events', might be reduced by reading a little on Weber's notion of 'elective affinity'. By teasing the strands of Weber's argument out further they may find that when working class people make the very significant decision of applying to Access as a preparatory route to university, their decision has little to do with 'chance', 'accidents', 'unpredictable events'. After all to embrace contingency is to abandon explanation.

If the moment of change is looked at from a morphogenetic perspective, with an extended version of Weber's 'elective affinity', such that affinity is based on structural, cultural, and personal 'push/pull' factors, then indeed, such decisions are very explainable, very understandable, due to being very structural, very cultural, very biographical and very cyclical. Even Webb et al's belief in the chance occurrences of prospective Access students meeting 'the right people in the right place to guide them' may not owe so much to chance, since the communication networks underpinning how people arrive on Access are not so coincidental as they may first appear to be. If it were so, then an awful lot of people have found themselves on Access by accidental default, and by definition, the whole Access programme, would rest on such 'unpredictable', 'chance', 'accidental' occurrences, rather than being amenable

to socio-cultural explanations.

According to Weber, Calvinists worried themselves about the issue of whether they would go to Heaven or not, it meant a great deal to them, culturally speaking. Working class people do not worry themselves about the issue of whether they will go to university or not, since it is not part of their structural-cultural experience of living, it would not mean, with the emphasis on mean, anything to them. In fact, their cultural experience within the structural framework would make them think the opposite, that university is a place they do not go to. University is not part of the cultural meaning of their working class up-bringing, related to the wider structural meaning of what it means to be working class. Their non-recognition of university from their cultural base is of course consolidated by the further culturally cultivated belief that people who go to university are somehow different, not only in the social class sense, but in the sense of possessing something called intelligence.

Access students are predominantly from working class backgrounds, have previously failed in the education system. The key question of the investigation is thus, why should working class people one day decide to want to go to university, in the first place, or more precisely in the second place, taking advantage of the 'alternative route' of an Access course. The key terminology in the former sentence is, 'one

day,' and that 'one day' is the future when, after many years out of the education system, without possession of the necessary A level qualifications, with experience of monotonous occupations, they suddenly go against their cultural grain, their cultural experience, their 'life meaning' and decide to enrol on Access as a way of entering higher education. Their cultural somersault would be something akin to a Calvinist blowing their profits on alcohol, gambling and the pleasures of the flesh.

People do not change their cultural meaning willy-nilly. For working class people, previously without a cultural orientation that included a university education, to decide in later life to enter university, tells us that something has been happening in their lives; something cultural. For a cultural meaning to change so significantly, the individual as part of a social group, must have had something significant happening, in their biographical make-up as an individual, in their cultural perceptions as part of a social group.

The next chapter looks at the Access students' 'Education Profiles', at the beginning of their education journey, at their school days, when the cultural meaning of their own agency, their working classness did not envisage a university degree as part of their cultural path. Their cultural meaning was to change later, much later, when as mature working class students they enrolled on Access, seeking entry to higher

education, a cultural rationale far removed from their experience of primary and secondary school years. The journey from being 'non-adult compulsory participants' to being 'adult voluntary non-participants' in the education system had a long way to go, with many lessons to learn, accruing qualifications of a kind not generally recognised by A level examination boards, but which were, nevertheless, significant enough to motivate them to obtain an Access 'passport' for entry to alien cultural territory.

## CHAPTER THREE

### EDUCATION PROFILES: (BEGINNINGS)

#### **Introduction: Apathy and Acceptance, Resistance and Rebellion.**

The previous chapter dealt with cultural meaning and its crucial place in the interplay between structure and agency. Access students are predominantly from working class backgrounds, as demonstrated by their distinct lack of educational qualifications and the distinct glut of unskilled, manual, clerical and tertiary occupational backgrounds presented in Chapter One. A brief overview of the content analysis of the students' words and thoughts on their experience of education suggest that it did not mean a lot to them, with deliberate emphasis on the word mean. School it would seem, was somewhere they had to go to; education was something they had to go through.

It was not a bad enough experience to make most react, in an extreme manner, by rejecting the cultural set-up of both school life and education values, as demonstrated in the work of Paul Willis [1977] and David Hargreaves [1975]. It did not mean enough to most of them to produce such a reaction, or cultural backlash, as was the case with Willis's 'Lads' or Hargreaves 'C streamers' and clearly there might be issues here relating to the stratification within social class, such that working class children as a whole accept, albeit in an apathetic



manner, the experience of school, but lower working class children do not.

The streaming bands of A, B, and C, are to all intents and purposes a cultural reflection of the social stratification system, encompassing middle, working and lower working class bands. This is not merely an issue of school testing and assessment procedures, for the streaming process occurred long before the children entered school. Effectively many lower working class children entered the C band at birth, the majority of working class the B band, and middle class the A band.

#### **Delayed cultural reaction amongst working class people**

If there is any difference between working class and lower working class children towards education it may well be that where the latter seem to exercise reaction and resistance, the former exercise apathy and acceptance of their lot. Reading through the Education Profiles of the Access students it is clear that they are distinguishable by the absence of strength of feeling about experience at school. Compared to the Work Profiles and the Personal Profiles where very strong statements are made by the majority of students, the Education Profiles are notable for their lack of both content and feeling. School it seems was neither Heaven or Hell, but somewhere in between, a pedagogic purgatory, leaving a bland memory of a seemingly

bland experience of school years; apparently not the best years of most students' lives but neither the worse.

The extremely negative and detailed statements given of students' work experience suggest strongly that unlike lower working class 'no-hopers' in the Willis mode, these working class children's reaction, was to come much later at work, behind the checkout till rather than the school desk, on the shop floor rather than in the playground, ironing the umpteenth shirt rather than gathering together the right ingredients for domestic science. The delayed cultural reaction, so-to-speak, needed the trigger of monotonous, alienating, years at work, as demonstrated in the students Work Profiles, and ultimately non-anticipated crisis or anticipated change, as demonstrated in the students' Personal Profiles which were the reasons they gave for wanting to undertake Access. This in turn made them think once again about education but with a different meaning now attached. The change from apathy and failure at secondary school to a strong personal desire in adulthood to enter university, means something must have happened enroute which is the core of the thesis.

The content analysis of the Education Profiles of the Access students, will I think clearly demonstrate these issues. When they were asked on their application form to 'write an account of your school/college background and how you felt about it. As with your view of work and other experience please write freely

about your views on education', this is what they wrote, this is what they felt, this is what they experienced.

The Chapter is divided into two sections, Section One, 'Teachers, Curriculum and Examinations' looks at the formal learning process of school and what it meant to the Access students, and Section Two, 'Cultural Attitudes: Parents and Pupils' looks at wider cultural and structural factors in relation to the formal education process. Each section is further subdivided into the following categories: Section One, 'Reflections on Teaching' (A1), 'Reflections on the Curriculum' (A2), 'Reflections on Examinations' (A3), and Section Two, 'Parents pushing education' (B1), 'Parental pressure to leave school' (B2), 'Not taking school seriously' (B3) and 'Regret not taking school seriously' (B4).

SECTION ONE      REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING, CURRICULUM  
EXAMINATIONS

Table 5: Total number of responses  
Data collected 1992-94

A1	A2	A3
Teaching	Curriculum	Examinations
Number of responses:		
7	8	11

The first issue, as with most of the identifiable factors found on the Education Profiles, is the very low response of students

in all three sections. Only seven students mentioning teaching in their application forms, six presenting a positive picture and one a negative one.

**SECTION ONE**      **REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING, CURRICULUM AND EXAMINATIONS**

**Table 6**    **First Factor:**    **Reflections on teaching**  
**Data collected 1992-94**

		Age							
		21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	
Female	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	
Total	4	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	
Total male students				5					
Total female students				2					
Total all students				7					

**Student No. 5. 43 year old female.**

I did not like this school as I was a pupil who would ask questions. If the teachers could not give an answer I was told to stop being naughty. I went along with the system just to keep the peace.

**Student No. 8. 21 year old male.**

If you are a model pupil with an exemplary record then this school offers the backing and resources, but if you are a problem child eg. learning difficulties, different ideas or a little subversive then no help is offered and you are just discarded and thrown on the scrap-heap. My own problem was that I despised the teacher/pupil relationship that some teachers tended to adopt. The Victorian attitude with the teacher having total domination over the pupil. I think that for a teacher to

be successful then they need to treat the pupil with respect and as an equal, also to make the subject as interesting as possible with great emphasis on student participation. Unfortunately some of my teachers adopted this Victorian attitude and so inevitably, I lost interest in the subject and my grades dropped.

**Student No. 81. 37 year old male.**

My own opinion is that much of my schooling, education at Woodlands was social conditioning for a life as factory fodder. I may be wrong but I believe I was not trained to 'think' but to 'do'.

**Student No. 92. 25 year old female.**

I found the teachers' attitudes towards disruptives or should I say bored pupils rather negative.

**Student No. 99. 40 year old male.**

I did not enjoy school at all. I think some of the training methods were to blame, it was very much of 'the don't ask questions just write down what I tell you and don't disagree me or I'll have you caned' system of instruction.

**Student No. 103. 22 year old male.**

At school I was quite rebellious towards teachers. as a result of my first year I received five stitches due to a teacher's actions.

Only one student had positive things to say about teachers:

**Student No. 53. 24 year old male.**

Despite 'Beano' style bravado at the time, my friends and I now admit that the teachers and whole school were brilliant.

Thus, out of a total number of one hundred and seventeen students, we have six who have positive reflections upon

teachers and one who has negative. The main issue is that one hundred and ten students never mentioned teaching at all, so bland apparently was their recall of the pedagogic process. From reflections on teaching to reflections on what was taught, the next section considers the students' thoughts on the curriculum. Once again there was a very small response was registered with only eight students mentioning curriculum issues on their application forms. A flavour of their responses is conveyed in the quotations following Table Seven.

**SECTION ONE**      **REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING, CURRICULUM AND EXAMINATIONS**

**Table 7**   **Second Factor**   **Reflections on the curriculum**  
**Data collected 1992-94**

	Age							
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0
Female	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
Total	2	2	0	2	1	1	0	0
Total male students	5							
Total female students	3							
Total all students	8							

**Student No. 59. 21 year old male.**

History was the only subject I could compete in because history has always been a major part of my life.

**Student No. 52. 45 year old female.**

I have always been interested in History from the Kings/Queens and dates that I learned to the social history that my children were taught. I enjoyed looking at the Ancient History and Art History that they studied at A level.

Not surprisingly, both students went on to study history as part of a combined university course. Seven students mentioned subject areas in the social sciences and humanities as their favourite areas of study with one exception who declared that ... 'Maths was always my best subject and perhaps not surprising my favourite'. (Student No. 87. 46 year old male). Another acknowledged his love of art but eventually ... 'dropped out, feeling that only academic subjects would help me find a job'. (Student No. 53. 24 year old male). One student identified in a very poignant statement the issue of gender in the curriculum, Student No. 10. 37 year old female, who said, 'The lessons I enjoyed I did excellent in the lessons I didn't I got poor marks - I still can't cook well or sew'. This highlights my comments in Chapter Two, and the school's abysmal attempts to teach me, as a working class boy, metalwork and woodwork, as I said 'my shelves always slope'.

One wonders how many times such a situation occurs in school life with girls and boys directed towards areas of study seen as compatible with a perceived gender disposition and how many boys (like myself) after four years of woodworking, metalworking, football, still cannot put up a shelf, mend a fuse, score a goal, and how many girls like Student 10, 'still can't cook or sew'. Clearly, gender issues are significant in

education and yet only one student specifically mentioned them in their Education Profiles. The reason for this, I believe, is that when looking back at school years, the tendency is to look back at the meaning of school in the cultural sense from working class eyes, identifying as the vast majority did, nothing in particular, even gender issues, so bland the experience, so bland the recall.

Thus the content analysis derived from the Education Profiles, to this point, has been very sparse, and very noticeable by the **lack of information rather than the information itself.**

The final section on formal schooling, moves from teachers and curriculum to a consideration of 'examinations', completing the **real tripartite system, the three 'T's', who teaches it, what is taught, and how it is tested.** The latter for most working class children was the ultimate cultural hurdle, where examination failure, the Eleven-plus, and performance in CSE'S, O Levels, GCSE's, or even the odd A Level, complemented their working class background and lead to greatly diminished life chances. **Only a few picked up the cultural pieces many years hence, on something called Access.**

A further very poor response was obtained from the students concerning examinations on their Access application forms, only eleven students mentioning examination issues. Table 8 provides a quantitative breakdown of their responses.



SECTION ONE      REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING, CURRICULUM AND EXAMINATIONS

Table 8    Third Factor:    Reflections on examinations  
Data collected 1992-94

		Age							
		21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male		0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0
Female		2	1	0	1	1	2	0	0
Total		2	1	0	3	3	2	0	0
Total male students				4					
Total female students				7					
Total all students				11					

Four of the eleven mentioned the Eleven Plus examination on the Education Profile sheets. Although the quantitative results are very few the qualitative statements express much in terms of the devastating effects of failing Burt's working class brachillia. Eysenck, Jensen and Co. should be very sure what they are saying about innate intelligence, about those deemed not to possess much of it, given the destructive effects it has on people's lives when categorised as not having much of it. The four, two men, two women, ranging from age 37 to age 48, clearly put them in the time span when the Eleven-Plus ruled the day in terms of educational and life chances. Their responses are illuminating and vindictive of what it meant (and means) to be an Eleven-plus 'failure'.

**Student No. 54. 39 year old female.B**

I believe the education system failed me as it does so many children. I was a failure at the age of eleven and carried on being one throughout school. I left school at fifteen without qualifications, carefully avoiding any jobs that would need an entrance test.

**Student No. 6. 37 year old male.**

I always felt that I should have been in grammar school, but I failed the 11 Plus examination, as it was put 'by the skin of my teeth'. Hence when I achieved four grade 'twos' and three grade 'threes' and virtually nobody achieved a grade one, (equivalent to an 'O' level) many of us believed there was a conspiracy. By whom we did not know. But we figured that if 'them' had given us the grade 'ones' that we deserved, then 'they' would be admitting that we really should have gone to the grammar school and that 'they' had made a mistake.

**Student No. 11. 45 year old male.**

In the 1950s and if you were clever you passed the 11+ exam you would then go to Grammar School possibly then on to University and onto upper class success, otherwise if you failed you went to Secondary Modern school and if you tried hard you would get a good working class job at the end of it. I failed.

**Student No. 20. 48 year old female.**

I left school at 15, though I had passed my 11 plus, my parent couldn't afford to send me to Grammar School as my brother was already there, so I went to St. James Convent in Edgware.

The four statements are supportive of the issues discussed throughout the Chapter in terms of cultural meaning. They are also very distinctive in elaborating on what failure meant to eleven year old working class children at the time and the negative feeling it left with them through their adult lives. Regarding the effect on attitudes in later life, Student. 54.

talks about 'carefully avoiding any jobs that would need an entrance test'. The commonest fear expressed by Access students, year after year, is the fear of examinations, especially amongst some of the older students.

The last words of **Student. 11**, 'I failed' are obviously not meant just as a factual statement, as a Positivist may record in a box on a questionnaire, but are laden with meaning that would justify detailed hermeneutic examination of what failing the Eleven Plus meant for working class people. (The word people is used rather than children for the implications of failing are only realised to their full extent in later adult life, when a person has had twenty years of working with their hands on a production line or in a cake shop as will be discussed in Chapter Four, Work Profiles.)

**Student 20.** highlights the combined effects of social class and gender, having passed the Eleven Plus but unable to take up her place in the grammar school due to her brother already being there, which meant her parents could not afford to send her. One wonders whether this would have been the case if the brother had passed the Eleven Plus after his sister. A quotation from some early feminist research illuminates the problems that can surface when gender, social class, education and lack of financial resources clash.

In my home I got a complicated message. On the one hand I was told I was as important and as competent as men. In other ways I was told this was not true. **Money** was set aside for my

**brother** to go to college but not for me. [Boston Women's Health Collective, 1971: 6. ] (The emphasis is mine.))

The above statement was made by a woman in Boston, USA, in 1971, and it is an indication of the international norm of unfair gender division that the statement could have been made by most women in most societies, not least a working class woman such as Student 20, when she wrote, 'my parents **couldn't afford** to send me to grammar school as my **brother** was already there'.

In their Education Profiles, apart from the Eleven Plus, students mentioned failing other examinations. All of the seven students who mentioned other examinations, spoke of failure in relation to CSEs, O levels, or GCSEs, depending obviously on their age and the examination available to take at the time. Various reasons are forwarded for this, from not working hard enough to being enticed into social life as they entered the crucial teenage years. The following two statements are illustrative:-

**Student No. 79. 21 year old female.**

At school I made the mistake of thinking that I did not have to give 100% concentration to work, I thought I would still get the grades I knew I would achieve. After my exams I realised how I wasted my time and I know that if I had worked properly I would have achieved what I expected for myself.

**Student No. 104. 23 year old female.**

... but as I reached the 4th and 5th years I began to lose interest in school, my interest now was my social life. My grades began to drop and I did badly in my exams.

**Student No. 70. 29 year old female,** brings a gender perspective into play and interestingly in relation to the private education sector. She writes ...

I did sit an exam to go to Grammar School which I passed but as it was the first time they had accepted girls they were only taking in a small number each year. I was disappointed when I didn't get in.

One of the eight mentioned the long-forgotten Pre-Tech examination, often referred to as the Thirteen Plus, when Eleven Plus failures, in the top bands of their secondary modern school were offered a second chance to go to selective schooling. Few took up the offer, having now established themselves in their secondary moderns, with two more years to go before before they started work. The offer for most came too late.

**Student No. 23. 44 year old male.**

From 1959 to 1964, I was at Secondary Modern School. The end result at the age of 16 was decidedly unremarkable, the only qualification available was the 'pre-tech' certificate in which a pass in four subjects was required, but I only attained two - English and technical drawing. I was labelled as being indolent quite early on - I felt that the best in me hadn't been brought to the fore and was capable of much greater achievement. Eventually though I tended to 'live up' to the 'label'. To leave school without any qualifications at all, was the cause, on occasions, of embarrassment for many years. There's a grave risk that I might be seen as 'carping', but my view-point is quite objective.

Of course any person's cultural view is at one and the same time subjective and objective from their experience of what life has been for them. We are reminded here of Laing's statement, that 'I can't experience you and you can't

experience me'; no amount of sociological study enables us to get inside each other's cultural biographical garb. They may appear as very subjective in their opinions to us, but what they feel about their experience is very real and thereby very objective to them.

A middle class person cannot know what it culturally means to be working class, and vice versa, a man cannot know what it culturally means to be woman, and vice versa, a white person what it means to be black, and so on and so forth. What we can do of course, is compare cultural notes, and as discussed in Chapter Two, **find out from others what it means to be what we are not**, further comparing the advantages and disadvantages of different cultural positions, the cultural attitudes towards our agency position and its structural restrictions. Section Two considers these factors in relation to the Access students' cultural experience of school life.

## **SECTION TWO: CULTURAL CONTRADICTIONS: PARENTS AND PUPILS**

Four factors are considered in this section, reflecting cultural attitudes of working class people, parents and pupils, towards education. B1 and B2 consider where the students have reflected on parental involvement with their school years, either as 'parents pushing education' (B1) or by 'parental pressure to leave school' (B2). The other two factors considered in the section, look at how the students perceived their own attitude towards school, whether they felt they were

'not taking it seriously' (B3) and on reflection whether they 'regret not taking education seriously' (B4). Clearly, the section attempts to tease out the cultural compatibility or/and contradictions between working class life and the formal education system. First though Table 9 provides a quantitative breakdown of all four factors considered in the section:-

**SECTION TWO: CULTURAL ATTITUDES: PARENTS AND PUPILS**

**Table 9 Cultural attitudes; parents and pupils:  
total responses. Data collected 1992-94**

B1	B2	B3	B4
----Parents Attitudes---		-----Pupils Attitudes-----	
Parents pushing education	Parental pressure to leave	Not taking seriously	Regret not taking seriously
Number of responses:			
2	5	12	12

**First Factor: B1: Parents pushing education**

Clearly, the figures in Table 9, B1, 'Parents pushing education', and B2, 'Parental/financial pressure to leave school', speak volumes by their lack of volume. Only seven students from a total of one hundred and seventeen, who completed the statement on educational experience, felt it necessary to say anything about their parents' attitude to education, one way or the other. The notion of parental

pressure to leave school, to bring money into the house, or to stay on at school, to do well, to do your homework, seems to pale into insignificance. The quantitative and qualitative responses in relation to B1 and B2 that follow, illuminate specifics, i.e. aspirations of the few in the case of B1. and apparently severe financial pressures of the few in the case of B2. Thus, what we will be analysing again, is not so much content analysis but lack of content to analyse; not meaning expressed in student statements but what that lack of **meaning means**. Correspondingly, an analysis of the statements of the few who did mention parental involvement may help to illuminate why the vast majority did not mention it at all.

The two students who highlighted the issue of '**Parents Pushing Education**', B1, contained important similarities with regards to staying on at school and doing well with their studies. Their statements in the 'Education Profiles' are as follows:-

**Student No. 50. 29 year old female.**

I left school 11 years ago with 8 O levels and CSE2 in Maths (my weakest subject!) and having failed 3 A levels. I had done so well in my O levels that it was a great disappointment to myself and my parents when my A level results were so poor. The truth was I'd lost interest in studying the same subjects and wasn't motivated by the thought of university at that time. Although I started work immediately I was badgered by my mum for years afterwards to re-take the A levels, but I had no interest in doing this.

**Student No. 14. 27 year old male.**

I feel that I was good at school but also that things would have been different after school if I had been allowed to do my own choice of subjects and had generally been allowed to progress in my own fashion. This feeds into the issue of my education as a whole. Although good at school, getting those



exams 'got in the way' of getting a fuller education and growing up. After a year and a term of A levels I felt that regardless of my father's feelings, my heart was not in the work and that I ought to break from what I thought would be 3 very low A level result because of my lack of commitment to subjects chosen by my father.

There are similarities in both quantitative and qualitative data of these two students, firstly that both students were in the age bracket 21-25, one male and one female, and that both were pressured by their parents to stay on at school to do their A levels. Both were what could be considered high flyers, coping well with academic study, especially written work from the start. Both were articulate, analytical students, both easily passing the course at the end of the year with credits in all areas. Their social backgrounds could be considered a little more middle class than most of the students, both coming from more professional families. Their obvious common cultural denominator was that out of a total of one hundred and seventeen students over a two year period, these were the only two who mentioned parental pressure to stay on at school and interestingly, both were in the same age bracket when returning to education. Their qualitative responses indicate they felt under some pressure to complete or re-take their A levels but that their commitment was clearly not to doing so, with Student 50. having a poor result and Student 14. fearing a poor result.

The work of Raymond Boudon, and his 'positional theory' may be applicable to the above, since both students felt under pressure from their parents to do well at school, and gain a

good result in A levels, but both were unable to deliver the cultural goods and thus experienced the disappointment of their parents for many years through their apparent 'social demotion'. [Boudon. 1974.]

**Second Factor: B2: Parental pressure to leave school**

Five students mentioned 'Parental/financial pressure to leave school' A2, and to leave school at the earliest possible moment. Two of them, **Student 89 and Student 91**, were working class women in the same age range, 41-45, both leaving school the 1960's, both experiencing financial hardship in their family situation and thus both culturally opposite to the two students experiencing parental pressure to stay on at school. Their experiences of parental/financial pressure to leave school are as follows:

**Student No. 89. 41 year old female.**

I wanted to go to Domestic Science College but due to family circumstances had to go to work, so I suppose in hindsight I never really tried too hard at my O levels.

**Student No. 91. 44 year old female.**

For the most part, I enjoyed school life and stayed on in education for a further year until the age of sixteen when the pressure to leave, start work and bring money into the family home became too much to bear, so I left school with a handful of CSEs.

In their 'Personal Profiles', when noting their reasons for doing Access, both mention that their marriages had broken down. One further point for consideration is that both of them

left the course around the half-way point, just after Christmas, due to financial pressures. Sadly, financial resources were the reasons for them not staying on at school, and also not completing the Access course. One would have thought that the similarities between the two are very obvious, and although there are only two students in this category, this makes the point more significant, since out of one hundred and seventeen students, they along with **Student 15**. were the only ones to talk about parental pressure to leave education to find employment and bring money home.

**Student 15**, the third student to mention parental pressure to leave school was one of the youngest students, age twenty one. His experience is similar to the two former students, although he is over twenty years younger than them.

I disliked school and just wanted to leave as soon as possible and had no encouragement from my parents to stay on in the 6th form. Maybe this was because they didn't do further education. Their main concern was for me to get a job as soon as possible in order to pay them rent so that they didn't have to keep me.

It would seem that although he was less than half the age of the two female students discussed above, being born in the early seventies, not in the late forties or early fifties, he like them found that financial pressures on his parents, placed parental pressure on him not to continue with education, and he left school ' to get a job as soon as possible in order to pay them rent'. His chance on Access came only five years after leaving school and, unlike the two women in their forties, was

able to complete the course and obtain a university place. His opportunity to do this can be seen in relation to his age, that he was single, without family commitments as experienced by the two single parent women. Clearly, gender, age, and marital status have an affect on students' opportunities to join and complete Access, even when they share the pressure to leave school to bring money into the home, even when they are a generation apart.

The other important factor to consider is the structural 'idea' of Access being available, and attracting people from certain cultural groupings. The Access 'idea' was available for **Student 15** when he was twenty one in 1993 but not for **Students 89** and **91** in the early seventies when they were twenty one. Thus, with Access commencing nationally in 1980, the ten years' time difference, can mean a significant difference in terms of people's lives, the desire for change, and what they can do about it, especially working class women, who at twenty one, may be single but at thirty one, married with children, and at forty one, single again but this time as a divorced/separated parent. Access may be the right idea, but for some may come at the wrong time, when there is a strong desire to change but cultural problems are compounded to the point where opportunity costs are too high.

The remaining two students who identified, parental/financial pressure to leave school provide further insight into the issue

of working class life, money and continuing with education beyond the minimum leaving age. Student 68 highlights how financial considerations are further heightened due to the untimely death of a parent, usually the working class father, thus invoking the gender connotations of the male 'breadwinner' role.

**Student No. 19. 29 year old female.**

I left with a handful of 'average' CSEs. College was out of the question, there was more emphasis on getting a job and helping the family budget, than getting further education.

**Student No. 68. 26 year old male.**

The thing is that in October of 1982 my father died. I was fifteen at the time and in my last year at school I'm sure this sounds very self pitying but I seemed to lose interest in continuing with school because I felt I should get out in the world and earn a living to help support the family.

To summarise factors B1, 'Parents pushing education' and B2, 'Parental/financial pressure to leave school', with only two students identifying with the former category, and only five with the latter, out of one hundred and seventeen students who completed the information obtained from the Education Profiles, their experience would thus indicate a specificity, in terms of their small numbers, but also a generality, characteristic of the other hundred and twelve students who made no mention of parental attitudes one way or the other. The main question raised by the findings here is not on why these five students mentioned parental involvement, but why the rest did not.

The final category in the 'Education Profiles' looks at the inherent contradictions within the cultural system and the resulting contradiction in attitudes it can create, when people reflect on their school years. The responses in this section were higher in general than in all the other sections of the 'Education Profiles', the reason being presumably that we are now dealing with expressed attitudes towards education and strength of feelings shine through. The number of responses for B3 'Not taking seriously' and B4 'Regrets of not taking seriously', are the two highest responses of all of the Education Profile categories. The response rate in 'Regret not taking education seriously', is not only an indication that the thesis is making morphogenetic sense, that as life changes so do perceptions of it and people become more actively conscious of decisions they have made in the past or will make in the future, but is also a poignant reminder of just how personally painful and arduous is the task of re-entering the education system as a mature student.

In terms of increased life awareness, through increased life changes, and increased life pain, leading to increased considerations when making decisions, such as whether to join Access, mature students are under a great deal of pressure to weigh up the opportunity costs for such a massive move in relation to what went before and the pain often associated it. The quantitative breakdown of each category says little about the issues but the statements that follow each will hopefully

illuminate the depth of student attitudes to their school years. To this end in this section the students' are given much of the floor since their own words can say far more than any gloss a sociologist could put on them.

## SECTION TWO: PARENTS AND PUPILS: CULTURAL CONTRADICTIONS

Table 10 Third Factor; Not taking school seriously (B3)  
Data collected 1992-94

	Age							
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
Female	3	3	0	2	0	0	0	0
Total	4	5	1	2	0	0	0	0
Total male students	4							
Total female students	8							
Total all students	12							

Their responses: (key points emphasised).

**Student No. 2. 38 year old black female.**

... but I was only interested in going out.

**Student No. 10. 37 year old female**

I wagged school whenever I could, not in the first 2 years but after. Sometimes it was only for a couple of days once it was for a week or a fortnight, which I spent sitting with my best friend in her garden sun-bathing. It's not that I didn't like school, I thought there must be other things to do.

Student No. 17. 25 year old female.

Until the age of 11 I was a studious child but when I reached senior school I discovered that those who messed around had more fun - so I joined the ranks of the 'rebellious teenager'.

Student No. 24. 30 year old female.

The education was not interesting to me through my teenage years and really at this school the teachers left it up to the pupils to decide whether they wanted to work or not. I needed to be pushed and given more encouragement as I was more interested in other things.

Student No. 26. 28 year old female.

I never really enjoyed school and felt it was a part of my life which I had to do. I feel I have sufficient intelligence to have gone on further but I was a typical teenager and I wanted to leave school as soon as possible to earn some money for clothes and nights out.

Student No. 46. 28 year old male.

I left the school for a job. I think at the time this was more to do with money than anything else, most of my friends had jobs and more money than me.

Student No. 61. 28 year old male.

School for me was where I went to see my friends and have a good time.

Student No. Student No. 92. 26 year old female.

As a teenager I did not attend school <sup>very</sup> often. When I was there I was rather disruptive.

Student No. 100. 24 year old female.

While I was there I didn't like it and wasted my time. I was



always told by my teachers I had a strong personality and was a leader, I just needed to put it to the right use.

**Student No. 103. 23 year old male.**

At school I was quite rebellious towards teachers. **My school days were like a day out.**

**Student No. 104. 23 year old female.**

... but as I reached the 4th and 5th years I began to lose interest in school, **my interest now was my social life.**

**Student No. 106. 33 year old male,**

As a child of the streaming system I was expected to do well. My first year was the start of my schooling decline and by year three I **was getting the art of wagging down to perfection. The only time I went back was to tell them that I'd left.**

The statements emphasise something of a push/pull factor. At a time when young people are at the most crucial moment in their school careers, examinations requiring more commitment than ever before including increased self-discipline for revision in their own time, the push factor is sharply and simultaneously contradicted by the pull factor, namely what it means to be, as one student put it 'a typical teenager', or more precisely what it means to be a working class teenager. The years of course can take their toll and the move from what it means to be a working class teenager, intent on leaving school at the earliest opportunity, to being a working class adult in a low paid, menial and monotonous jobs can bring deep regrets of not taking education seriously. The fourth and final factor of the

'Education Profiles' considers the regrets expressed by the students when reflecting on their school years and how they now feel remorse about their negative attitudes at the time. First though a quantitative analysis of the responses:-

**SECTION TWO: PARENTS AND PUPILS: CULTURAL CONTRADICTIONS**

**Table 11 Fourth Factor: Regret not taking school seriously B4**  
**Data collected 1992-94**

	Age							
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male	4	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Female	2	1	0	3	0	0	0	0
Total	6	2	0	4	0	0	0	0
Total male students	6							
Total female students	6							
Total all students	12							

The section on ' regret not taking education seriously' is indeed one revealing remorse and regret with students blaming themselves for their lack of educational qualifications rather than the prevailing education with its disadvantages for working class people. The reactions are intrapunitive perceptions of themselves rather than attributing some blame to cultural/structural factors. The following five examples

provide a flavour of what they are saying. I have used bold type to emphasise pertinent statements.

**Student No. 4. 23 year old female.**

I **regret** now not taking my education seriously thus now realising that I want to carry on my education where I left off.

**Student No. 10. 37 year old female.**

But I **regret** it now because I know I could do so much better than I'm doing now, I encourage my son all the time (he's neverwagged it ) to try hard now it's your future that's at stake -do you want a job or a career you enjoy.

**Student No. 56. 38 year old male.**

I didn't realise then the value of education, this was the late sixties when a factory job - for life - was there for the taking. How I **was to regret** that philosophy!

**Student No. 100. 24 year old female.**

My feelings of school are probably the same as most other people. While I was there I didn't like it and wasted my time there. It wasn't until I left and went into the wide world that I realised I had wasted what little time I had for education. It is something I **deeply regret**. I wished I had settled down and worked harder to achieve better results.

**Student No. 104. 23 year old female.**

but I **am ashamed to admit I wish I was back to mend the errors of my ways.**

Regrets are terrible emotions, often accompanied by remorse, and self-guilt. The tendency is to over blame one's self, for what has happened in the past which according to Laing can be

very restrictive on our capacity to live for the moment. He says ...

The most simple things or the most difficult things in life is getting through a day well, is not easy. That's the most difficult thing in life, I think, is living, for me, I mean really living. A lot of the time I'm in the present and I'm thinking about the past or scheming about the future and missing every present moment, instead of actually partaking of the sacrament of every present moment. That's the healing factor. If we could get into that, then that is healthiness and the agent of healing. So I endeavour to live in that manner myself and I endeavour to entice other people to consider living in that sort of way, as best they can. [Laing, 1989: Channel 4 Television.]

Of course 'regrets' cannot easily be separated from cultural factors, and the rueful responses above have much to do with the structural 'carve up' in society and the cultural contradictions within it. The fact that the highest recorded response of content analysis of any category in the 'Education Profiles' concerns regrets, says a lot about what education can do or cannot do, for someone and to someone. It can get you a job, but not necessarily a good one. It can get you to university, but not necessarily or even probably if you are working class. A structural and cultural understanding of the state of affairs we call our 'past' would provide us with a very different view of what we did and what we regret doing and what we decide to do in the future.

People who never make mistakes never make anything. Robots never make mistakes. Better to be a rueful human being than a ruthless robot. Some of our actions, some of our decisions, may haunt us till the time we leave 'this mortal coil' but all we

can say is we tried our best at the time, all things, structurally, culturally and biographically considered. By such understanding not only can we begin to rid ourselves of excessive personal remorse and regret and concentrate on the present, but also to be aware that others who seemed to be acting against us were only acting under the same structural/cultural conditions as ourselves. Therefore we can also learn not to regret too excessively and also learn to understand.

### **Structural, Cultural, Familial and Biographical Factors**

Everyone is affected by structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors, whatever they choose, or are able to choose, to do with their lives. But culture is by no means a static social entity. The fact that one hundred and seventeen mature working class people seek to enter university after the negative experience of school life outlined in the 'Education Profiles', suggests clearly that people do change and that cultural perceptions are by no means static. To a large degree, our cultural moment is made by those who went before us, through the cultural legacy they socially bequeathed to us, though this was not necessarily intended to be as they left it, or as we found it. Likewise we in part both adopt and adapt, as they had to, to the circumstances in which we find ourselves, bequeathing to others the changes we have made to it, whether planned or inadvertently generated by our interaction with others. If the moment holds, the culture

holds, if the moment brings change, the culture may change. That cultural moment did not hold for the Access students, who, in spite of their apathy towards and acceptance of the negativity of school life, now do wish to enter higher education; personal morphogenesis.

We are obviously back once again, as demonstrated in Chapter Two, 'Structure and Agency Interplay and Cultural Change', to people being born into a complex set of structural/cultural ways of thinking and acting, of rules, regulations and roles. As we find it, so we live it, and so also, we have the possibility and potential to change it, depending on our own social position in relation to others who may want to bring about transformation and others who may want to preserve the status quo. So depending whether we find our cultural moment advantageous or disadvantageous, (to varying degrees) we can seek either recursiveness or change in our own lives. The pursuit of change involves new experiences and through that experiencing, adapting to new perceptions of our past life circumstances, our present situation and the desire/possibility of a different future. As Markovic says, 'There are several possible futures and one of them has to be made'. [Archer, 1992: xxiii. from Markovic, 10-11.]

An important corollary to Markovic's statement is that the making of that future, depends not solely on personal choice, since choice and the strategies one adopts or is able to adopt,

depend on one's social position, in relation to the wider social restrictions and limitations of society over the execution of one's strategy. As Archer states, 'For we are all born into and can only live in an ideational context which is not of our own making. Our very knowledge about is, our vested interests in rejecting it or retaining it and our objective capacities for changing it have already been distributed to us before the action starts.' [Archer, 1992: xxii.] (The emphasis is mine). In other words agency may decide to do something about it (society), but society may not be so easy to do something with, not least because it comprises other agents, with more structural power, intent on not letting things change since it would be to their advantage not to do so.

Nevertheless, change does occur, is always occurring. Thus, the Access students felt the need to return to education, in spite of, and not because of their early negative experiences at school, and the availability of such a thing. Such an entity as Open Access, meant that the chances of returning to education, of entering university, were enhanced. Since education now meant something to them, in the cultural sense, as working class adults experiencing life changes and crises, then the eventual tie up with the 'idea' of Access makes cultural and temporal sense in terms of Weber's 'elective affinity', i.e. right idea, right time, right person. Thus, in short, structural changes in the education system, reflecting perhaps wider structural changes in the employment sector, and

the needs of the economy, proved highly compatible with the personal changes, crises, of these Access students, firing them to return to education with future aspirations of university entry, in very sharp contrast to the apathy recorded in the 'Education Profiles'. As an 'elective affinity' in operation it incorporated a structural, cultural and biographical morphogenesis.

The circumstances under which people find themselves living at any given time and how they negatively, positively or neutrally experience them, affects both what they want do and are able to do about their situations, if anything at all, in relation to their own cultural position in society. Attempts at change may be completely unsuccessful or only partially successful, but the main point is the desire to change rather than the success of the same. If people decide to change their social script due to the experience of the social drama they find themselves in, the instigator of social change is set in motion, through the dynamic interplay of agency/structure and their interconnectedness. The strength of feeling, the meaning behind the action, the desire to do something about it, e.g. withdraw their labour, go-slow, plant bombs, declare war, hold back their poll-tax payments, decide to join an Access course, affect those actions and influence their effectiveness. Their strength of feeling, the degree of change they want, will determine their strength of action in attempting to achieve these ends, but not necessarily with the results they wanted,



since prevailing social and natural factors, such as other agents having a similarly strong desire to resist change also influence outcomes. Changing cultural course is not easy and involves not only the desire but also the right structural and cultural environment.

### **Changing cultural course; flying out of formation**

Our birth culture and the experience of the cultural road we travel does not always follow the expected and anticipated signposts. We may arrive at halts, at crossroads, where crucial decisions have to be made regarding the next stage of the journey, when opportunity costs for travelling this way or that way have to be taken into account before the journey progresses, something which is akin to Markovic's statement discussed earlier regarding 'possible futures'. The course we eventually take may depend to a large degree on the course we have already travelled, and our experience of the road. Thus, from the information discussed in the Education Profiles one would have thought that **a resumption on the educational road would have been the last thing any of the students would have ever considered.** Indeed, to most around them, family and friends, the declaration of cultural intent to return to education, often leaves the onlookers in a state of cultural bewilderment. The story of 'Educating Rita' and 'Eliza Dolittle's' transformation is told over and over again in many Access courses. Once the person breaks cultural ranks, so-to-speak then problems ensue. Laing has thoughts on such issues:-

From an ideal vantage point on the ground, a formation of planes may be observed in the air. One plane may be out of formation. But the whole formation may be off course. The plane that is 'out of formation' may be abnormal, bad or 'mad' from the point of view of the formation. But the formation itself may be bad or mad from the point of view of the ideal observer. The plane that is out of formation may be also more or less off course than the formation itself ... The 'off course' criterion is the ontological. One requires to make two judgements along these different parameters. In particular, it is of fundamental importance not to confuse the person who may be 'out of formation' by telling him he is 'off course' if he is not. It is of fundamental importance not to make the positivist mistake of assuming that, because a group are 'in formation', this means they are necessarily 'on course'. This is the Gadarene swine fallacy. Nor is it necessarily the case that the person who is 'out of formation' is more 'on course' than the formation. There is no need to idealize someone just because he is labelled 'out of formation'. There is also no need to persuade the person who is 'out of formation' that cure consists in getting back into formation. [Laing, 1990: 98-99.]

The working class person seeking to enter university, may well be flying out of cultural formation with their cultural nearest and dearest, and the research attempts to uncover that which put them off course. However, from, as Laing says' 'an ideal vantage point', say that of a sociologist, the person off course, the working class person attempting university entry, may well be considered to be flying on a more constructive, though turbulent path, that will steer them away from the formation's ultimate culturally alienating destination of factory, office, shop work, or housework. This is not to suggest that the working class person, intent on university, who is 'out of cultural formation' is more 'on course' than the formation they left, or the formation they enter. As Rita's tutor sardonically reminds her ... 'Found yourself a culture have you Rita? No - you've found a different song, that's all-

and on your lips it's shrill and hollow and tuneless.'  
[Russell, 1983: 69.]

Whether this is indeed the case is debatable and would need to be investigated in a different story, a different morphogenesis, where, in the putative chapter called, 'New Beginnings', the question in the 'Higher Education Profiles' may well ask, 'Write an account of your university background and how you felt about it. As with your views on work and other experience please write freely about your views on further/higher education'. One wonders how those futuristic new views of new stories may contrast with the views of the Access students on this present stage of their journey. We do know for instance that the marital breakdown figures for mature students progressing through a university degree are much higher than the national average. Presumably the cultural chasm opened, causing painful divisions between working class partners; more pain, more regrets to come? This may all seem a long cultural time away from the moment when they were asked on the section on education in the Access application form to, 'Write an account of your school/college background and how you felt about it. As with your view of work and other experience please write freely about your views on education'.

The 'Education Profiles' have told us what they said, and to all intents and purposes, **although this was very little, it told us a lot.** It told us that as working class children at

school, the Access students were flying very much in expected cultural formation, towards compulsory state education, and quickly out of it again, that is as soon as legality permitted, but still in social class formation, towards early manual or clerical work. The speed of their exit was because there was no chance of breaking the cultural barrier of middle class academia of formal schooling. Most of course do commit cultural hara-kiri by their socially alienated attitudes to the education system itself and the negative cultural meaning it has for their lives. **The important factor is, that one day in the future they were to break cultural formation and return with intensity to the educational arena, intent on a safe landing on the higher ground of higher education.**

### **Strength of feeling**

The strength of feeling expressed by the students in the Education Profiles, under all the headings considered is not strong. When compared with the intensity of expression found in the Work Profiles (Chapter Four) about their employment experience, and in the Personal Profiles (Chapter Five) about their experience of life and the reasons for wanting to join Access, the contrast with the Education Profiles is heightened still further. Likewise, the quantitative results are very small in comparison to the number of responses found in both Work Profiles and Personal Profiles.

Clearly the negative experience of school life expressed by the students does not lend it self to seeking a return to education. Thus the change of consciousness, the desire to re-enter the world of education must relate to changes that occurred long after the last day at school, which from a morphogenetic perspective was not to be their last day in education at all; their educational journey wasn't ending but just beginning.

Few Access students, given their negative experience of school life would ever have thought that they would be seeking to return to education in the future, that their apathy towards education would one day be an appetite for more academia, revitalised to such an extent that they sought to move from a position of holding few if any educational qualifications to wanting to obtain a university degree. The road from apathy and negativity towards education, to positive aspirations of obtaining a higher education qualification is culturally complex and only being capable of being untangled from a morphogenetic perspective of events.

In the following Chapter, 'Work Profiles', the Access students talk about their working lives. If education represented apathetic cultural acceptance of what had to be, then work it seems offered alienation from what could not be endured, but had to be for material survival. Clearly the evidence from the 'Education Profiles', suggests that without some significant

change of cultural perception via cultural changes in the students' lives, then the desire to enter university would probably not have developed at all.

The apathy and negativity towards education during their school days, expressed by the students, could hardly be seen as laying the future foundations for wanting to re-enter education as a mature student. The thesis is seeking to discover what factors affected 'mature students' decisions to undertake an Open Access Course for possible entry to university' and clearly their experience of school was not one of them. Indeed in direct contrast to firing them into such action, the statements in the 'Education Profiles' suggest that formal education would be the last place any of them would want to go back to, let alone where they would expect to find answers. Their journey had some way to go yet before the eventual cultural somersault took place that they were to perform at the point of their applications to join Access.

In the 'Work Profiles', we move from 'beginnings' to 'middles', to that crucial part of the journey, in a morphogenetic sense, where cultural consciousness is most susceptible to undergoing significant change, through socio-cultural interaction. For the Access students, glad to leave school, eager to start work, eager to earn money, eager to get on with their adult working class lives, the middle of their journey was to be found in the workplace.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### WORK PROFILES (MIDDLES)

#### Introduction

The procedure for investigating the information on the 'Work Profiles', is divided into three main sections, 'Negative Work Experiences', 'Positive Work Experiences' and finally, 'Reasons for Leaving Work'. The Chapter is true to the morphogenetic journey ethos of the study, providing a very appropriate 'middle' linkage between the negativity of school life, commencing work and the personal alienation that was to ensue, and the activation of personal change witnessed in the 'end game' and reasons for entering Access. Thus, in the 'Education Profiles', students spoke about wanting to leave school to go to work and earn some money, either to supplement the family budget and/or enable them to participate in the teenage years, 'I was a typical teenager and I wanted to **leave school as soon as possible to earn some money** for clothes and nights out', [Student 26, 28 year old female]; 'I left school with a handful of average CSEs. College was out of the question, **there was more emphasis on getting a job and helping the family budget**, than getting further education'. [Student 19, 29 year old female]. (The stress is mine).

For working class teenagers leaving the negativity of education and entering the potentially promising world of work, the realisation of what has happened, once the 'teenage dust' has

settled, can be devastating to say the least. Hence the first section in the Chapter on 'Work Profiles' looks at '**negative work experiences**' the 'beginning' of the work story. Section Two, '**positive work experiences**', identifies what students found at their work place to provide mental satisfaction, and the overwhelming evidence suggests that this was nothing to do with the work itself, but with the comradely relationships with fellow 'alienated' workers. The final section, '**reasons for leaving**', the 'end' of the work story for many, either leading to motherhood roles, or voluntary or compulsory redundancy. The 'end' of the work story, completes the work morphogenetic cycle, but leads on to the next stage, the end of the 'journey', 'Personal Profiles', Chapter Five, which investigates why people decided on Access, which more often than not related to changes or crises in their working or personal life. Of course, this final stage is also the start of a new morphogenetic cycle.

Thus, the story seems to be that I didn't enjoy work, it was monotonous, alienating and not well paid, but the part I did enjoy was becoming involved with other people during the course of my working day. Finally, 'reasons for leaving', the third section of the 'Work Profiles', completes the story, or rather the middle of the story, awaiting 'endings' and 'new beginnings' when decisions were made to undertake Access, discussed in 'Personal Profiles'. Each section of the 'Work Profiles' is further subdivided into the following categories:-



Section One, 'Negative Work Experiences' including 'Boredom at work' (C1), 'Not achieving true potential' (C2); Section Two, 'Positive Work Experiences' including 'Working with people' (D1), 'Job satisfaction derived' (D2); Section Three, 'Reasons for Leaving', including 'Redundancy' (E1), 'Birth of a child' (E2) and 'Marriage' (E3).

The number of responses in 'Negative Work Experiences', are much higher in comparison to any other factors considered in Chapter Three, 'Education Profiles'. The cumulative number of all students in this section, forty eight in all, represents nearly a half of the one hundred and seventeen students who completed an Access application form. The highest category in 'Negative Work Experiences', is C2, 'Not Achieving True Potential', followed closely by 'Boredom at work' C1, both obviously related issues in terms of what work can mean to someone. Clearly most jobs carry a certain element of boredom, whilst overall still providing a sense of fulfilling one's potential, as with the bureaucratic side of teaching for instance, but excessive boredom at work as identified by the Access students, can be an indication that one is not achieving one's true potential at all, due to disadvantageous cultural factors.

The separation of these two related categories, is retained in order to maintain demarcations used by the subjects themselves, in terms of what students actually said, despite the fact that

following the 'spirit' of the issue they could have been fused into one. However, with one following after the other, 'Boredom' and then 'Not Achieving True Potential', the subtlety of the story line, the beginning, and the middle, may be captured. First the number of responses:-

#### SECTION ONE: NEGATIVE WORK EXPERIENCES

Table 12: Boredom and Not achieving true potential: total number of responses: Data collected 1992-94

C1	C2
Boredom	Not Achieving True Potential
Number of responses:	
22	26

**Wheels within wheels, cycles within cycles, stories within stories.**

The compatibility and combination of Archer's morphogenetic approach with the notion of biographical journeys of Laing, is significant here, as we consider stories within stories. The beginnings, middles and ends of the education story, in Chapter Three, occur within the wider story of 'education' (beginning), 'work', (middle) and 'joining Access' (end); wheels within wheels, cycles within cycles, journeys within journeys. As ever there is always need to consider carefully, not only the plot, the unfolding structural cultural drama, but also the roles of

the players, and how comfortable or uncomfortable they feel, how they are taken on board, adopted, adapted, or shed by the players as they move from one scene to another, as in the case of working class girls at school, becoming working class women at work, more often than not incorporating married housewife roles as well.

Thus, quite a number of the responses of those students who experienced 'boredom' at work, are women who talk about it in relation to the division of gender roles at work. This is interesting since in the 'Education Profiles', when the students talked about their school days, there were few direct or even indirect responses of gender issues. It may be that work, as part of the continuum of the gender socialisation processes, emphasises most intensely, especially for working class people, the demarcation between male and female gender roles.

The first category then of 'Negative Work Experiences', looks at '**Boredom at work**', C1, with twenty two student responses, the highest recorded response of any category so far in the research. Table 13 on page 167 provides a quantitative breakdown of the responses.

The student statements on the issue talk constantly of boredom, of repetition, of routine and mundane work. All of their responses are reproduced, the reason being that the quantity of

the responses reinforces the quality of the responses by repetitious reiteration. Content analysis really comes into its own as a social research method by its ability to gather simultaneously, both quantitative and qualitative material, providing flexibility of usage at key points of the research. Such a key point in the research is reached now. Taking further advantage of content analysis, I have highlighted in bold text the key words of boredom, repetition, routine and mundane in the students responses immediately following Table 13.

**SECTION ONE:    NEGATIVE WORK EXPERIENCES**

**Table 13:    First Factor: Boredom at work (C1)**  
**Data collected 1992-94**

Age								
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male	2	3	2	3	0	0	0	0
Female	3	2	0	4	2	1	0	0
Total	5	5	2	7	2	1	0	0
Total male students	10							
Total female students	12							
Total all students	22							

**Student No. 6. 37 year old male.**

I would usually start in a new position feeling quite excited about new challenges, new people and new responsibilities, but

this inevitably changed to feelings of **boredom** and dislike of the way things were done.

**Student No. 12. 25 year old female.**

I learnt to type at the age of 13 and by the time I left school and had not really decided what I wanted to do career-wise, I knew that I would 'end up' in secretarial work.

**Student No. 13. 25 year old female.**

I also worked as a cleaner in a local factory. I found cleaning work to be **very dull** and **repetitive** and felt very much like a second class citizen to the people I was cleaning up after.

**Student No. 14. 27 year old male.**

I would usually start a new position feeling quite excited about new challenges, new people and new responsibilities, but this inevitably changed to **feelings of boredom** ... After only one month I found the job very tedious and totally unstimulating ... after 7 months with this company all the old feelings about corporate greed, **lack of job satisfaction** and **lack of stimulation** returned with a vengeance. I very much want to re-enter the educational world in order to get qualifications that will allow me to have a wider choice of work with a view to greater job satisfaction. Now as an independent adult I am choosing to change career because of limited job opportunities and job satisfaction. To complete my education will open up my options and hopefully place more **mentally stimulating** and **satisfying** jobs within my grasp.

**Student No. 15. 21 year old male.**

The thought of going back to a menial job with poor wages and no mental satisfaction makes me feel, in a word depressed.

**Student No. 24. 30 year old female.**

At a Supermarket on the fruit and veg counter. I found this job quite **boring** as there is no **real variation in the day to day work**. Working in the bakery and also frozen gateaux department which was **conveyor belt work**, this I found **extremely monotonous**. This type of work was something I feel I could have

done with my eyes shut as there is no real need to think about what your doing.

**Student No. 26. 28 year old female.**

The factory work was **mundane** but a necessity, obviously for the salary.

**Student No. 29. 48 year old female.**

Factory-Machinist, **Boring - Repetitive** only money and good work friends made it worthwhile - **no mental satisfaction**. (The format of the wording is the student's own).

**Student No. 30. 30 year old male.**

... unfortunately the job became a nightmare, everything went wrong about work, **repetition**, low wages, no acknowledgement of initiative.

**Student No. 31. 27 year old male.**

I need to get thinking again because **I'm brain dead (Typical factory worker)**. To be honest I hated every day of it because it was like being back at school - you against them - the system that I hated at school existed in the factory. After my apprenticeship they put me into hell where I have spent the last 7 years - So why have I spent 10 years of my youth in this industrial prison. (The brackets are the students own).

**Student No. 44. 32 year old male.**

At the time I was dead chuffed to have kept my job. Then things started to become **boring**. I **couldn't stand to go back onto a job where I had to become a cabbage again, just couldn't**.

**Student No: 52. 45 year old female.**

I was married, had two children and then many, many temporary jobs. Although most jobs were for very short periods others went on for up to two years. the duties included more less all types of office procedures in a variety of businesses. Of

course some of this work was **repetitive** and **boring** and it was a relief when the contract ended.

**Student No. 56. 38 year old male.**

I went to work in a packing case factory, **boredom numbing my brain** to the extent that I lasted only 3 days.

**Student No. 58. 22 year old female.**

Some of the work I done was very **monotonous** and felt I wasn't using my full potential.

**Student No. 60. 38 year old female.**

I then worked as a machine operator for a dry cleaners, the job was interesting, using different chemicals to remove stains from clothing, the **most exciting part was the maintenance of the cleaning machine and the boiler**. I had to know everything about the Machine, how to take it to pieces, and how to put it back together again. If anything went wrong you were responsible. In both of these jobs I **felt that as most women I had ended up with low pay and poor working conditions which were also dangerous**. (I have checked this response with the student and she did mean the above statement in a sardonic manner).

**Student No. 69. 40 year old female.**

I worked in a factory as part of a team preparing and canning fish. The jobs I have done in the past I found **boring and frustrating** and I feel I am capable of doing something better.

**Student No. 81. 37 year old male.**

I want to stay away from the **relentless boredom of industry and its intellectual void**. There must be more to life.

**Student No. 85. 37 year old female.**

I've worked in a few factories and I **hated** this type of work, it was **boring**.

**Student No. 86. 32 year old male.**

At Austin Rover I had a job that did stimulate me for a time, but I must admit that even then jobs that I did on the section became **repetitive**.

**Student No. 91. 44 year old female.**

I moved on to another factory to work in one of their large offices and **HATED** it. **Boring** and **repetitive** are the words that spring to mind. (The use of capitals is the student's.)

**Student No. 93. 41 year old female.**

My first job was as an office junior I both detested and enjoyed. Detested because I didn't like typing and working on the switchboard, but mostly I didn't like the **routine** every day **nothing being different, being able to predict exactly what was going to happen each hour of each day**. I enjoyed however working with the people.

**Student No. 103. 22 year old male.**

Most of the jobs I have had in the past are what's known as dead-end jobs, such as warehouse and sales, as they are regarded as regular jobs in the respect **you do the same thing day in day out**, I found I lost interest quickly due to the fact they were **unrewarding** and **routine**.

Alan Sillitoe's, much acclaimed, though controversial novel, of working class life, 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, says it all:-

The minute you stepped out of the factory gates you thought no more about your work. But the funniest thing was that neither did you think about work when you were standing there at your machine. You began the day by cutting and drilling steel cylinders with care, but gradually your actions became automatic and you forgot all about the machine and the fact that you were cutting and boring and rough-threading to within limits of only five-thousandths of an inch. The noise of motor-trolleys passing up and down the gangway and the excruciating din of flying and flapping belts slipped out of your consciousness after perhaps half an hour, without affecting the



quality of the work you were turning out, and you forgot your past conflicts with the gaffer and turned to thinking of pleasant events that had at some time happened to you, or things that you hoped would happen to you in the future. If your machine was working well-the motor smooth, stops tight, jigs good- and you spring your actions into a favourable rhythm you became happy. you went off into pipe dreams for the rest of the day ... It was marvellous the things you remembered while you worked on the lathe ... [Sillitoe, 1958: 43-44.]

I have spoken to many people over the years who have worked in such a monotonous working environment, work friends, students at college, and they all seem to paint a very similar picture to Sillitoe's fictionalised version. I have rarely found the same 'fictional realism' in sociological studies of working class life, for the meaning is missing, Huw Beynon's 'Working for Ford' being an excellent exception to the rule. Whatever, sociologists miss out in their studies, it is something quite important, something to do with 'spirit', with 'flavour', with the moment which they are attempting to capture. As Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden say in their study, 'Education and the Working Class':-

... it's quite common to meet sociologists who put aside the work of the novelists as merely entertainment and have no perception at all of what the great masters of prose fiction have yielded to our central store of knowledge about the workings of society. [Jackson and Marsden, 1976: 17.]

It seems reasonable then, that a sociological analysis of life in contemporary society should not be afraid to utilise a cultural cocktail of both past and present creative cultural writing, in order that it may capture the flavour of the times and the dynamics of social change. So in relation to work, when D.H. Lawrence writes ...

There is no point to work  
 unless it absorbs you  
 like an absorbing game  
 If it doesn't absorb you  
 if it's never any fun,  
 don't do it.

When a man goes into his work  
 he is alive like a tree in spring,  
 he is living, not merely working.  
 [In Gibson, 1968: 113.]]

he seems to be echoing very clearly what the Access students said about the monotony, the boredom, the routine of it all in relation to their work and their being working class. When a person is absorbed in their work and 'not merely working', as Lawrence writes, then we could argue that such absorption is something akin to realising one's true potential. The second factor of negative work experiences looks at the students' thoughts on their working life and how they felt that they were not achieving their true potential. The quantitative picture first:-

#### SECTION ONE:    NEGATIVE WORK EXPERIENCES:

Table 14:    Second Factor:    Not achieving true potential (C2)  
Data collected 1992-94

	Age							
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male	2	3	0	3	3	0	0	0
Female	7	3	1	1	2	2	0	0
Total	8	6	1	4	5	2	0	0
Total male students	11							
Total female students	16							
Total all students	27							

The highest response recorded so far in either the 'Education Profiles' or 'Work Profiles', concerns the statement that the applicant was 'not achieving her/his true potential'. This displaces 'Boredom' C1, from the top of the league table. Clearly these two reactions are very closely related in the continuing story of beginnings, middles and ends, for when a person begins to feel that they are not realising their potential in terms of the work they do, and if the problem is a everyday growing feeling, the cumulative effects can be the instigators of monotony, boredom and ultimately the desire for change. The end is possibly in sight and the desire for a new beginning may be nascent. Once again, considering the importance of this response category in relation to the theme of the thesis, 'journeys', the students' statements are produced in full. Gender divisions are clearly identifiable again, with many women failing to realise their potential in gender related occupations. As with the 'Boredom' category I have highlighted in bold the relevant points in the student responses as further illumination of the frequency and intensity of these feelings.

**Student No. 1. 25 year old Asian female.**

At school I knew I was a gifted pupil but did not carry on to prove this. I really now need the opportunity to realise my potential.

**Student No. 6. 37 year old male.**

I've been involved with different people most of my life and I see this course as the first step in a new personal direction

that will **allow me to fulfil my potential** in this area I seem naturally to have had most association with.

**Student No. 7. 22 year old male.**

The reason why I want to do access is so I **can achieve my full potential in life**, hopefully gaining good enough marks to gain a place at university.

**Student No. 10. 37 year old female.**

I need something else, I really need to find my potential, I dread the thought of working in a cake shop until I retire when I know I can do more.

**Student No. 11. 45 year old male.**

Whilst a living was being provided there was always a sense of frustration a feeling that somehow I was **not ever fulfilling my true potential**.

**Student No. 13. 25 year old female.**

I feel I want to do a job that involves **using brain power**. All the jobs I have mentioned could have in my opinion **been done by a monkey** so I felt quite wasted.

**Student No. 18. 48 year old female.**

I have been told by a few people that I **have a potential and aptitude to do better in life**. I have never really had the courage to believe this, so now I want to find out for myself. I know Education, like travel broadens the mind. I want some of that experience, and am excited (but very scared) at the prospect of growing in the important area of knowledge.

**Student No. 23. 44 year old male.**

For at least the last 10 years of employment, I felt a growing disquiet that **my full potential wasn't being realised**. This feeling intensified in 1987 with the resumption of shiftwork. I

felt economically trapped in an increasingly unbearable situation.

**Student No. 24. 30 year old female.**

I think possibly if there was a larger variety of meals to prepare/serve the job would have been a little bit more interesting although it was **not really the work I had planned to for the rest of my life.**

**Student No. 25. 32 year old female.**

... and I think that I can offer good life experience and I **would like to realise my full potential in a worthwhile career.**

**Student No. 28. 37 year old male.**

My main reason for an Access Course and ultimately a Degree Course is that I do not want to be at age 40 on the rubbish pile in the job market. As I am currently on a media training course I feel that taking time out now **to fulfil my potential,** educationally, I will have a better than average chance of landing a well paid, career job in the media.

**Student No. 29. 48 year old female.**

Now life was very hard both on an emotional and economic level. Equate me with factory fodder is how I saw myself, but not at all happy to continue to deny my ability, therefore want to **find my true potential so I can realise same.**

**Student No. 36. 37 year old male.**

I felt there was little job satisfaction particularly in later years. Truck and assembly work I found to be **soul destroying.** With most workers the only career progression was an easier job and the only pleasure was to see other colleagues struggle or slip up ... Some people can through their life doing mundane work, switching on and off with the clock card. But regardless of money **this is not my idea of job-satisfaction or self-fulfilment.** These jobs have to be done but I feel I done my share.

**Student No. 50. 29 year old female.**

I feel that gaining a place on this Access course will help build my confidence, widen my scope and keep me in touch with other people who feel they haven't yet fulfilled their potential.

**Student No. 58. 22 year old female.**

... and felt that I wasn't using my full potential.

**Student No. 59. 21 year old male.**

As for work I have only experienced government training schemes. For me this made me realise that I was not using my full potential and this in turn made me feel my life was not fulfilled.

**Student No. 62. 23 year old female.**

Not only does it give me the opportunity to fulfil my true potential, it also has subjects I want to study.

**Student No. 65. 24 year old Asian female.**

After a year and a half in this job, I had slowly become aware of the lack of achievement I felt in my work.

**Student No. 68. 26 year old male.**

I really do feel and this is at the risk of sounding awfully 'big headed' that I'm better than being just an unthinking factory worker. I really feel that I do have potential to achieve more with my life. One thing I've also been afraid of is the fear of the unknown of giving up what I've got. Now, I feel that the 'known' of what I will be if I don't go and try and better myself is far more frightening.

**Student No. 72. 45 year old male.**

For a long time I have felt frustrated and not able to realise my potential.

**Student 74. 25 year old female.**

My first job was a waitress in a pub at dinner time. I didn't enjoy it one bit.

**Student No. 76. 29 year old male.**

I have always known within myself that I am not only capable but also more suited to something better ... I have drifted from one thing to another always hoping to better myself financially, which for the most part has never been achieved, **whilst knowing I would never fulfil myself as a person**, this has been a predominant thought since my late teens and the consequent disillusionment not only with the work but also my life-style has led me to walk away from jobs 'happily' whilst other people are queueing up for any kind of work they can get.

**Student No. 82. 26 year old male.**

I have reached a point in my life where the need for a channelled and more focussed direction for my potential is very strong ... **with a fresh desire to fulfil my potential.**

**Student No. 83. 42 year old female**

The employment I have attended has usually been part time to fit in with my family, eg. bar work, clerical work. My last job was in retail and I was a cashier with a city centre fashion shop. Other employment has usually been within a secretarial role, word processing, etc.

**Student No. 85. 27 year old female.**

I realised I needed to do something **more constructive with my life.**

**Student No. 91. 44 year old female.**

... and I want to learn all sorts of things - **to fulfil my potential, both academically and as a person.** I see no point in cruising the notice-boards in the job centre when I can be enjoying myself at college with the added bonus of **QUALIFICATIONS!** (The student's use of capitals.)

Student No. 100. 24 year old female.

I want to do this course because I feel at the moment I am not working to my full potential and I feel I owe it to myself.

The phrase, 'not realising my true potential' has something of a psychological feel about it, as though the person uttering this would be best advised to go to see a counsellor to help them find that which they seek. Yet the story that has been told in these pages is very much a structural and cultural one, very much a social rather than an individual one. The restriction of potential can clearly be laid at the door of social structures and cultural positions rather than personal inadequacies.

The students speaking for themselves say much more than a sociologist could about the cultural meaning of the monotony of their work experience and the frustration of not realising their true human potential. The statements also provide us with insights into what it means to be 'woman', and what it means to be 'working class woman'. The poorly paid, monotonous, almost stereotypical work that the women are found in reveals the dual negativity of being working class and female. The division of labour in which the role of woman as the 'carer' is particularly important and underscored in the 'Personal Profiles'. With children growing up, settled perhaps at school, many of the women, taking stock of their new situation decide to do Access. Gender issues are also found in abundance in the last section of this Chapter, 'Reasons for Leaving Work'.



The high rate of students responses which form two key categories within 'negative work experiences', 'Boredom' (C1), twenty two students, and 'Not Achieving True Potential' (C2), twenty six students, are significant to the theme of the research because indicating that many of the students were very dissatisfied with their adult working lives. This is important because it means there is a negativity surrounding their work life, which although still operating as a constraint due to financial needs, could act as a push factor, should the opportunity costs alter and allow it to do so in the future. Thus, later in the Chapter when considering 'reasons for leaving work' (Section Three) quite a number of students volunteered for redundancy when it was offered, taking the first real opportunity with some financial support attached, to get out of the negativity of work. Negative feelings about one's situation, whether at work or in one's personal life, is fertile ground for change should opportunity costs allow this.

Having accentuated the negative it is time to reverse the trend and emphasise the positive, in the second section of the 'Work Profiles' Chapter., 'Positive Work Experiences'. This it will transpire is equally important in terms of the course of action eventually followed. However to understand this it is necessary to highlight how far 'working with people' featured as the main source of job satisfaction for many. First though the total number of responses for the two factors considered under this

section, 'Working with People' (D1) and 'Job Satisfaction Derived', (D2).

**SECTION TWO: POSITIVE WORK EXPERIENCES**

**Table 15: Working with people (D1) and Job satisfaction (D2):  
Total number of responses**

Data collected 1992-94

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D1	D2
-----	
Working With People	Job Satisfaction Derived
-----	
Number of responses:	
-----	
44	7
-----	

The first crucial finding was the very high response rate, i.e. forty four respondents who registered 'Working With People' as a 'positive work experience', the highest response of any part of the research, overshadowing anything analysed in both 'Education' and 'Work Profiles'. Category D2, 'Job Satisfaction Derived', with only seven responses, is a very low number when contrasted with the forty four who identified with 'working with people'. However, these two factors need to be unpacked in relation to one another, for the latter is also tapping into the former upon closer inspection. In terms of the 'meaning' behind the very high response of one positive work experience and the very low response of the other, one relating to people, one relating to the work process, then Marx's concept of alienation may prove to be a very useful sociological tool to keep in mind

in understanding and explaining these. Table 16 below provides a quantitative breakdown of 'Working with People' (D1).

## SECTION TWO: POSITIVE WORK EXPERIENCES

Table 16 First Factor: Working with People (D1)  
Data collected 1992-94

	Age							
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male	4	4	2	2	0	1	0	0
Female	7	8	3	5	5	3	0	0
Total	11	12	5	7	5	4	0	0
Total male students			13					
Total female students			31					
Total all students			44					

A flavour of the responses is conveyed by the generous selection below, where their presentation again allows the qualitative to benefit the quantitative.

### **Student No. 3. 33 year old woman.**

My first permanent position was that of a secretary to a Senior Manager. But I quickly became discontented with this type of work, as I felt it wasn't mentally fulfilling, and my skills were not being utilized to their full potential. Due to dissatisfaction I left this position, and started work in a more shop floor orientated environment, as a Progress Controller. This was slightly more satisfying, as it did involve communicating with people at all levels, on a more personal basis. It was then that I became aware that **it was the people involvement aspect of the work that I found the most rewarding ...** It was after my first period of maternity leave, that I progressed into the Administration/Personnel side of the

industrial environment. Initially I was an Administration Officer, and then after my second period of Maternity Leave, progressed to a Pensions' Office, which had a great deal of people-involvement, having to deal with very delicate issues like bereavement. This gave me a great deal of satisfaction and achievement and made me realise my full potential in this area of work.

**Student No. 11. 46 year old male.**

Only whilst working as a Buyer at a forklift company was full job satisfaction reached, meeting a variety of different people interpreting and trying to fulfil their needs.

**Student No. 12. 26 year old black female.**

I have always wanted to work with people in some form of counselling.

**Student No. 13. 26 year old female.**

The next job I had was after my children were born. I found part-time work in the local pub. I enjoyed bar work immensely as I met a lot of people.

**Student No. 20. 39 year old female.**

I spent 25 years working in a garage ending up as manager. I enjoyed the variety of meeting customers.

**Student No. 21. 41 year old female.**

and I liked the customer contact.

**Student No. 22. 41 year old female.**

My first job was as a pool assistant at a university which involved lifeguard duties as well as reception work. I loved the job as I met so many different people.

**Student No. 42. 25 year old female.**

Nevertheless I had a few casual jobs of not much importance apart from the fact I was 'getting out' and **being with other people**. I normally did waitressing or bar work where I **could talk with the public** and make new discoveries and friends.

**Student No. 43. 27 year old female.**

The one aspect of hairdressing that has always satisfied me is the close one to one **relationship with people**, how individual everyone is and how no two minds are the same.

**Student No. 44. 28 year old male.**

I started working as a French plasterer for a company that specialised in interior design, this was a very skilled type of job, with a lot of craft work in, but there would still be days when **the need to work with people** would arise in me, so during working for this company I knew I would have to change my type of work.

**Student No. 62. 23 year old female.**

I have nearly always worked as a barmaid. I **enjoy being in direct contact with people** most of the time and feel that I am there to help them with their problems if they require. I have worked with and served some very weird and wonderful people. I've become the sort of person who would like to get into your head, if you're interesting enough.

**Student No. 63. 46 year old female.**

I have worked as a Primary School teacher for the duration of my working life, until my resignation in 1992. I found certain aspects of my work enjoyable and fulfilling, in particular, the fact that I **was working with people** and helping them achieve and develop.

**Student No. 67. 33 year old black male.**

Doing plate grinding and washer grinding. This job was my first, I liked **working with people**.

**Student No. 70. 29 year old female.**

The aspect I enjoyed in my jobs **was meeting people** of all ages.

**Student No. 82. 26 year old male.**

With all those jobs, except the counselling, I felt bored, uneasy and always dissatisfied ... After my postal work I did not return to work. I searched for something to satisfy my deeper needs. I found as time went by **an increasing desire to work with, to help people.**

**Student No. 83. 42 year old female.**

... with a double glazing firm and although I **enjoyed meeting people** and organising the staff I did not particularly like the way that people were treated in this particular industry.

**Student No. 85. 27 year old female.**

Since 18 I have had many bar jobs. I **have enjoyed this type of work** because you meet people.

**Student No. 93. 41 year old female.**

... I enjoyed however **working with the people.**

**Student No. 100. 24 year old female.**

At present I'm a waitress, I **like working with the people** but at the end of the day it's a job.

There are many people doing a variety of different jobs within the forty four responses, where most of the work bordered on the mundane, repetitive and boring as discussed in the 'negative work experiences' section. Yet the common positive denominator is that within the alienation of it all, 'working

with other people' was clearly the thing that kept them going. Working class people tend to work with things rather than people, related of course to their overall social class position and their lack of formal educational qualifications for employment of a more creative nature; **Burt's twisted chicken coming home to roost, not at his doorstep but in the monotony of it all for those deemed 'good with their hands' rather than 'good with their minds'.** Clearly there is a big difference, in the work environment, between that which motivates and that which alienates.

Alienation is arguably the most convincing of Marx's arguments, which can be witnessed each day and every day, in the faces of the supermarket checkout assistants, passing the item under the laser price recorder, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, week by week, year by year. **The main means of holding on to their 'species being', their 'peopleness' is by communicating with fellow workers trying to hold on to their 'species being', their 'peopleness'.**

Reinforcing that finding that the 'people factor' was the key part of job satisfaction, **in jobs where job satisfaction was hard to find,** is the small number of those who could extract any other rewarding experience. The respondents in this category were only seven, indicating that few of the one hundred and seventeen students derived any memorable and thereby mentionable job satisfaction from their work duties.

**SECTION TWO: POSITIVE WORK EXPERIENCES**

**Table 17 Second Factor: Job Satisfaction Derive (D2)**  
**Data collected 1992-94**

	Age							
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	0
Female	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Total	1	2	1	1	1	1	0	0
Total male students				4				
Total female students				3				
Total all students				7				

The qualitative analysis of the seven, suggests strongly that those who highlighted job satisfaction as a positive work experience, did so because of the 'craft' nature of their work, and/or the notion of fulfilling the needs of others. For instance, **Student No. 61. 28 year old male**, talks of his days as a car mechanic:

Most of the time I was pleasantly pleased with my work to see a damaged car in its prime again, but for the last eighteen months I feel I have come to a crossroads in my life and realise there must be more to life than going back and forth to a garage everyday.

Similarly the following examples, although from a variety of occupations, identify both 'craft' and 'meeting people's needs' as key factors in job satisfaction.

**Student No. 2. 37 year old black female.**

I long to go back to nursing where you would go home mentally



and physically strained but you knew you had accomplished something and you were appreciated.

**Student No. 11. 45 year old male.**

Only whilst working as a Buyer in a factory was full job satisfaction reached, meeting a variety of different people interpreting and trying to fulfil their needs and in most cases achieving this.

**Student No. 29. 48 year old female.**

Floristry - hard work, visually rewarding and can be very satisfying ... Fair division of work is essential to satisfy ones creative 'bent', can be stimulating and challenging.

**Student No. 30. 30 year old male.**

The job (toolroom worker) was actually quite interesting in that it was not production based and was always presenting new challenges ... The next period of employment on a government sponsored Community Programme scheme. I was a part-time gardener. This I thoroughly enjoyed because of my keenness for gardening and that it served some purpose in keeping the elderly and disabled in contact with their community.

**Student No. 77. 31 year old male.**

Towards the end of my schooling I began working for a local building firm ... this gave me a great fulfilment as I was able to construct things for other people, to construct things did give me a lot of pleasure.

**Student No. 79. 21 year old female.**

I now have a job working with people who have a learning difficulty. All the residents are individual people and although work can be sometimes frustrating, it is where I am most happy ... it has given me a happy environment, an interesting occupation and above all it makes work not like work, you're happy to be there.

We can see in these responses a threefold satisfaction derived from the students' previous work experience; that of being creatively involved in the 'product', that of obtaining satisfaction from the 'end product', and that of seeing the 'end product' fulfil the needs of others. A demonstration indeed of Marx's alienation concept, culminating in Student 79's statement that ... 'it makes work not like work, you're happy to be there'..

The last section in the chapter on 'Work Profiles' looks at 'Reasons for Leaving Work'. First the total number of responses for each factor considered:-

### SECTION THREE     REASONS FOR LEAVING WORK

Table 18:     Redundancy (E1), Birth of a child (E2) and  
Marriage (E3): Total number of responses.  
Data collected 1992-94

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E1	E2	E3
-----		
Redundancy	Birth of child.	Marriage
Number of responses:		
-----		
8	16	5
-----		

The categories in the 'Reasons for Leaving' can be seen as being influenced to a large degree by gender roles. Thus in the first category 'Redundancy', (E1) five of the eight who mentioned redundancy were male, in the second category, Birth

of a Child' (E2), all sixteen responses were from women as were the five responses in the final category, 'Marriage' (E3). Since leaving work, whether through redundancy or through voluntary resignation, means change of some kind, then change itself at the point of 'reasons for leaving work', is clearly related to gender roles. It also means that we can catch the first glimpse of the divisions between 'anticipated' or 'non-anticipated' life changes. First, the following Table gives a quantitative breakdown of 'redundancy'.

### SECTION THREE: REASONS FOR LEAVING

Table 19: First Factor: Redundancy (E1)  
Data Collected 1992-94

	Age							
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male	0	2	0	1	2	0	0	0
Female	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
Total	0	3	0	2	2	1	0	0
Total male students	5							
Total female students	3							
Total all students	8							

The response of the eight were the following:-

**Student No. 14. 27 year old male.**

I pursued another area of work and found a position in a small engineering company. After only one month I found the job very

tedious and totally unstimulating. Eventually I was made redundant.

**Student No. 20. 48 year old female.**

I then joined a furniture store as a part time clerk in Customer Service after a short time I was asked to join them as a full time Senior Office Clerk. I was made redundant in 1991.

**Student No. 21. 40 year old female.**

It was a lovely job, 4 hours a day with a travel agents. Unfortunately after 3 years I was made redundant due to the fall in numbers of people booking holidays, I became an unnecessary luxury. I soon found another part-time job, again 4 hours a day with a building society ... However after 12 months with this building society I was again made redundant when the branch was closed.

**Student No. 23. 44 year old male.**

In November 1991, two colleagues and myself, out of a compliment of 80 drivers, accepted voluntary redundancy.

**Student No. 81. 37 year old male.**

I worked as a maintenance sheetmetal worker for fifteen years until volunteering for redundancy in 1986.

**Student No. 82. 26 year old male.**

The next job I undertook was working in a car factory. I was 17/18 at the time. After six months the job finished through redundancy.

**Student No. 99. 41 year old male.**

I stayed at the factory for eighteen years and the only defence I can come up with for staying so long is that I made many good friends. However in 1986 I was made redundant. After six months on the dole I got another job again in an engineering company

and I stayed there for five years until I was made redundant again.

**Student No. 108. 30 year old female.**

On completion of this Course I became a Clerk Typist. After redundancy, I was internally transferred to a better position as an Admin. Clerk Typist Telephonist. I was sent on a GPO Course and learnt to use a Word Processor, Switch Board, Telex Machine etc ... After four years I was once again made redundant.

Redundancy is a very important factor not only in changing people's overall life circumstances, but in influencing whether they would have decided to change the course of their lives, had the redundancy not occurred in the first place. One also has to consider the issue of people volunteering for redundancy, as some of the students did. Whether this can be seen as crisis, i.e. a non-anticipated change, since redundancy was not planned for, or an anticipated change, since once redundancy has been offered the person has a choice of whether to volunteer or not, may be best answered by discovering which came first. Thus, when voluntary redundancy is offered to workers, this in itself can be seen as a crisis of a kind, since by definition it creates a new situation for the worker, a situation requiring choices.

The fact that one worker volunteers for redundancy whilst others do not, also says something about the personal situation of the worker, that s/he may have felt dissatisfied with work and wanted a change anyway, with the redundancy offer acting as

a catalyst. Financial considerations are important since the worker would have been free to terminate their employment at any time, but the financial inducement of redundancy is what makes the decision possible. The key point is that without the redundancy, with the redundancy payment, the worker may not have left their employment so in this sense voluntary redundancy has to be seen as non-anticipated change, a 'crisis', activating desired change.

The issue clearly has gender connotations, since very few married men, for instance, voluntarily leave a job to undertake an Access Course, the opportunity costs being too great in terms of their socialised 'breadwinner role'. The numbers of middle aged working class men on the course are much less than they used to be, say in the early eighties at the height of the great redundancy years as the country's manufacturing base was drastically cut back. Even with disillusionment with working life, boredom, monotony etc., it is doubtful that without the involuntary 'push' of redundancy, many working class married men would ever voluntarily arrive on Access; the gamble would be too risky, and the stakes too high. With redundancy, the odds are considerably lessened, with the first decision of leaving work made for them, providing the necessary impetus to realise, perhaps, a long sought after goal, to get out of a factory and do something different. (These issues are discussed further in Chapter Seven, 'Elective Affinities').

Structural changes, such as recession, unemployment etc. filter down to cultural collectivities ultimately producing changes in the biographical situation of individuals, transforming their cultural/biographical journey in a way that may never have been considered let alone realised without this alteration in structural conditioning (the result of structural elaboration taking place elsewhere, but impacting upon the situation and circumstances which such individuals confront). The next category under 'Reasons for Leaving Work', looks at 'Birth of a Child' (F2) which might be a prelude to joining an Access course when the children reach school age five years later. (The morphogenetic storyline continuing in the students' 'Personal Profiles' (Ch.6.), with their reasons for Access).

### SECTION THREE: REASONS FOR LEAVING

Table 20   Second Factor: Birth of a child (E2)  
Data collected 1992-94

	Age							
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Female	3	2	3	6	0	0	0	0
Total	3	2	3	6	0	0	0	0
Total male students	0							
Total female students	14							
Total all students	14							

The responses of the fourteen are transcribed below. As with certain other categories, the use of content analysis, provides a highly compatible fusion between quantitative and qualitative data. The illumination supplied by these fourteen, who cited the birth of children as a reason for leaving work, soon gives way to repetition when one reads one after the other of the following responses all of which highlight the issue of gender divisions. (The emphasis is mine).

**Student No. 9. 28 year old female.**

After leaving school at 16 years of age I have worked continually, apart from **short breaks to have my children.**

**Student No. 17. 25 year old female.**

I left work in January 1991 after 3½ years **to have a baby** and for the past 8 months I have been purely a mother which has been the most enjoyable experience of my life.

**Student No. 21. 40 year old female.**

Five years ago I returned to the 'world of work'. I managed to get a part-time job **after 11 years at home looking after my family.**

**Student No. 22. 40 year old female.**

I then started a family and **have not had a paid job since 1976.**

**Student No. 24. 25 year old female.**

The next job I had was **after my children were born.** I found myself part time work in the local pub. I had to stop doing the job when my husband and myself split up as I had no-one to look after my children while I worked at night.



**Student No. 25. 32 year old female.**

I got married, became pregnant and haven't worked since, apart from once a fortnight doing old people's hair at a residential home.

**Student No. 40. 37 year old black female.**

My work ceased when I decided to start a family.

**Student No. 71. 31 year old female.**

As soon as I began to have other commitments in my life, ie family, it began to get difficult to work in a hospital as the hours are unsociable.

**Student No. 73. 34 year old female.**

When pregnant with my second child I resigned and became a full time mother.

**Student No. 84. 36 year old female.**

After 6 six years I left to have my first child, followed two years later by twins. I think this was definitely the turning point in my life and my self confidence increased.

**Student No. 89. 39 year old female.**

I gave up work to have my son in 1977 and stayed at home for 5 years. After this I worked again in insurance but then wanted a change and went to work as a temp.

**Student No. 90. 28 year old black female.**

After having the baby my first of 4 and moving into my own flat in the same year ... I was saddened to think that this was all I would do for the rest of my life. NO MONEY! NO HELP! NO FRIENDS! NO LIFE! (The use of capitals is the students).

**Student No. 92. 25 year old female.**

When I was nineteen, I had a child, packed up work, soon after this I got married and had another child. The marriage lasted two years.

**Student No. 110. 38 year old female.**

I had to leave as I was expecting my daughter. For the following 12 years I stayed at home bringing up four children.

When student 40 says, 'My work ceased when I decided to start a family', she says a lot. Firstly, the total acceptance of the 'woman's lot' that when children are on the way, formal work comes to an end, returning perhaps at a later time, to part time work. Secondly, the irony of the situation is that according to much research, rather than 'work ceasing when women decide to start a family' as Student 40 puts it, work really starts in earnest. For instance Ann Oakley found in her research that women do on average a ninety hour week in their combined mother and housewife roles. [Oakley, 1974] The women above, accept so readily that their working life comes to an end when families start, often leaving their career aspirations in tatters, due to the culturally enforced 'gender redundancy' involved in raising a family. Thus by the time the children have started full time education, or settled in their school life, the woman is left to pick up the pieces of her working life five years on, usually in a part time, low paid, insecure job. It is at this point that some women may feel that a return to education, to an Access programme for instance, is the best strategy to enhance their qualifications, depending of

course on the opportunity costs at the time, not least financial considerations.

For some women the 'end', or the first interruption, of their working life comes at the point of marriage and fulfilling the demands of the housewife role some years before motherhood takes its toll. The final category in 'Reasons for Leaving Work', and the final category in 'Work Profiles', looks at 'Marriage' (E3).

### SECTION THREE: REASONS FOR LEAVING

#### E3: Third Factor: Marriage

Three students mentioned marriage as a reason for leaving employment. Their responses:

**Student No. 63. 46 year old female.**

Because of the direction my personal life took, early in my career, through entering into a marriage which was in serious difficulty from the onset, any difficulties I encountered in my job were compounded ... and in 1992 I decided to resign.

**Student No. 93. 41 year old female.**

I went back into office work and although I still like it very much I stayed there until I got married and moved out of Coventry.

**Student No. 102. 33 year old female.**

After my short career working with computers I then found myself in a position where being married and having two young children I was looking for part time work.

When, Student No. 93. 41 year old female, says ... 'I went back into office work and although I still didn't like it very much I stayed there for 5 years until I got married and moved out of Coventry', the issue of whether men would consider such a change of their working life because they got married is highly improbable, but for some women it certainly does seem to mean that getting married implies leaving work. Presumably, the cultural meaning behind women leaving work after getting married, is part and parcel of the notion of the historical development of both female housewife role and male breadwinner role. It may of course be something more culturally akin to the lives of working class people in general, and working class women in particular. Middle class women, through better educational qualifications, careers, and accompanying career aspirations are culturally socialised to think further than housewife/mother roles, or at least to establish themselves first and view marriage and children as something that comes next. Thus one cultural group, middle class women, tend to obtain educational qualifications and careers before marriage and children whilst the other cultural group, working class women, get married, have children and then return to work, rather than to careers or/and decide to polish up their educational qualifications by attending their local college, perhaps doing an Access course.

The final two categories in 'Work Profiles' identified a definite gender pattern, a trend, in terms of why people leave

work, e.g. only women leave work to get married or to have children. This may be more immediate for working class women than middle class women, although the cultural specifics of gender roles suggest that whilst the former may be immediate the latter may be something akin to 'delayed cultural reaction'. That delay, may see the middle class woman with educational qualifications, including a university degree, and possibility second one, an established career framework on which to fall back on after the birth of children or later when they are settled in school, or making sure that their career is so advanced that they do not have to cease work for children due to being in a position to afford good child care. In sharp contrast, the working class woman, as part of her surrounding cultural expectations and observed experience may move more quickly towards marriage and children, and has much less to fall back on when working life is resumed at a later stage, usually on a part time basis, and with less money available to pay for child care. The interplay between social class and gender roles is an obvious one, uniting women's cultural experience at one level, that is their 'femaleness' but distinguishing them at another, namely their 'social classness'.

Similar distinctions can be made in relation to the lives of middle class men and working class men, the similarities of their 'maleness' and their dissimilarities in relation to their social class. The cultural meaning of the breadwinner role to

both groups, is of course tacit, but their different structural cultural biographical matrices mean that one group, that is middle class men, generally obtain educational qualifications and usually a university degree, prior to commencing their careers, whereas working class men move immediately to a work environment. Unlike their working class counterparts, whether women or men, they do not as part of their cultural path expect to pack up work for a time to get married and have children, only resuming the work path once children are settled at school. Few working class men would leave work, due to the nature of their breadwinning role, which in working class lives is more pronounced, more crucial in terms of financial survival, especially where only one partner is working full time. The role is complementing to the domesticity of working class women. They may have aspirations to do something more with their lives, particularly as a working class woman whose children have started school, but the opportunity costs are very great to both themselves and their families.

### **The 'stuff of dreams'.**

Some of the earlier feminist work on the controls exerted by working class men via the breadwinner role, suggest for instance that it places great restrictions on them in their dealings with their employers and that they cannot easily withdraw their labour during industrial disputes due to the family suffering. [Benston, 1972.] One could extend the work

of Benston and others coming from a Marxist feminist perspective, to view the structural control of capitalism, not only as a discipline on the working class man's conduct at work, his and his family's material survival, but also on his dreams. They may be dreamt but not fulfilled, since employed industrial labour as the main breadwinner is a life-long commitment. After weighing up the opportunity costs few make the decision to leave employment to start an Access course at their local college with the intention of going on to University. Redundancy may not be welcomed at the time of its announcement but it does mean that the man is involuntary disconnected from his machine, his breadwinner role, and with the decision having been structurally taken for him by his employers, the unintended consequences for himself, and the structural reasons for them, are that he may now be in a position to fulfil those dreams that came to his mind as the lathe turned its umpteenth metal part. Alan Sillitoe:-

It was marvellous the things you remembered while you worked on the lathe, things that you thought were forgotten and would never come back into your mind, often things that you hoped would stay forgotten. Time flew while you wore out the oil-soaked floor and worked furiously without knowing it: you lived in a compatible world of pictures that passed through your mind like a magic-lantern, often in vivid and glorious loonycolour, a world where memory and imagination ran free and did acrobatic tricks with your past and with what might be your future, an amok that produced all sorts of agreeable visions. [Sillitoe, 1988: 44.]

What we are talking about here is perhaps the 'stuff that

dreams are made of', dreams rarely fulfilled in terms of either working class men or women. In his study of Ford production workers Huw Beynon, writes about the lives of working people, the lives that they lead, and their cultural pragmatism in understanding the structural-cultural set-up, the alternatives, the factory dreams, and the opportunity costs of attempting to achieve them.

People, living their lives, develop a pretty accurate idea of their own life chances, of the odds they face and the hopes they can realistically entertain. One of the more obvious criticisms of much that passes for social science is that it drastically underestimates people's intelligence. Working-class people are faced with a limited number of employment prospects all of which are pretty dreary. If you're young, with family responsibilities and want to move out of the house you know to be a slum you attempt to get as much money as you can by selling to the highest bidder. In a hard world you become a hard man. This doesn't mean that you are not aware of alternative things, better ways of living, but merely that these are unlikely to be open to you. If you work at Ford's, on the line, you let your mind go blank and look forward to pay day and the weekend. [Beynon, 1984: 123.]

So the 'stuff of dreams' is often the unreachable, but dreams like poverty are relative to what the person has and to what the person wants. The middle class cultural acceptance of a university education, of a rewarding and satisfying job involving that important factor of 'working with people' rather than 'with things' may be to them an actual, factual reality, obtained by their cultural collectivity, with its advantages and superior life chances, whereas to the working class person, such may indeed be the 'stuff of dreams'.



Following up his discussion of the pragmatism and realism of working class people to their overall cultural position Beynon teases out further the 'relationship between the real and the ideal'. He asked one production worker about the notion of an 'ideal job' and obtained the following response:-

Oh. You're talking about in my dreams, like. The sort of thing I'd really like to do if I had the chance. Oh yes ... I'd like to work on a newspaper. I'd like to meet people. To do something like you're doing yourself. Find out the facts about people's problems. You know about social problems. I've a reasonable knowledge of English. I used to write in the school magazine. I've always had it in the back of my mind. My school teachers said I should do it. I often think about it. There's no possibility now, like. [Beynon, 1984: 124.]

Another response from another production worker:-

Your choice of job is governed too much by money. You've got to be a realist. You've got to be a realist. What I'd like to do though would be a sports teacher - teach physical education to lads. That's my ideal job, it's important, it would give me a better outlook on life.

You don't achieve anything here. A robot could do it. The line here is made for morons. It doesn't need any thought. They tell you that. 'We don't pay you for thinking' they say. Everyone comes to realize that they're not doing a worthwhile job. They're just on the line. For the money. Nobody likes to think that they're a failure. It's bad when you know that you're just a little cog. You just look at your pay packet - you look at what it does for your wife and kids. That's the only answer. [Beynon, 1984: 124.]

### **Cultural 'realism' and 'cultural pragmatism'**

The 'realism' of the worker related very clearly to my own term 'cultural pragmatism' referred to in Chapter Three, 'Educational Profiles'. So when the Ford worker says twice,

'You've got to be a realist', he is weighing up his own cultural position, the pragmatism of adhering to it, and the opportunity costs to his family should he abandon realism and chase his long-remembered and long-relegated dreams.

So when the Ford worker said ... 'You're talking about in my dreams, like. The sort of thing I'd really like to do if I had the chance', [Beynon, p.124] then chance is the thing that matters. Structurally and culturally speaking, working class men and women have little chance of entering University, of finding a mentally satisfying job involving 'working with people', of fulfilling their dreams. But structural and cultural constraints and restraints are by no means static, they do fluctuate, do change, do provide chances, opportunities for change, albeit by the unintended consequences of the dynamics of the social context in which they live their lives. The structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors and their temporal interplay affects people's decisions and the significance of the thesis title makes sense in relation to the school and work experience of the Access students in their 'Educational' and 'Work Profiles'

## **Conclusions**

The three sections devoted to the 'Work Profiles' have taken us on a journey of sorts, following that of the Access students from the negativity of education to the alienation of work. We have witnessed 'journeys within journeys', the ending of school

years, the eagerness for that ending; the desire to start work, earn some money, the realisation of what work without educational qualifications can mean to working class people, for the more minimal the educational qualifications the more menial and tedious the job. Paul Willis has identified how cultural reaction and resistance to the cultural negativity of school life ultimately leads to mundane and repetitive work; a 'no win' situation for the 'lads'. [Willis, 1977]

Section One, 'Negative Work Experiences', demonstrated clearly that work was a place of great mental dissatisfaction for many of the Access students, where they felt that their potential was not being realised. The sentiments of the production workers in Huw Beynon's Working for Ford, seem highly compatible with the sentiments expressed by the Access students in their 'Work Profiles'. By letting the men talk for themselves, Beynon captures very clearly the 'meaning' of work for the Ford workers and hopefully the 'Work Profiles' have captured what it 'meant' for the Access students. So when one of Beynon's production workers says:-

I bring books and crossword puzzles to work. This gives me something to think about when I'm doing the job. You walk out there in a dream ... I will leave soon. It's getting me down. It's so monotonous, tedious, boring' [Beynon, 1984: 129.]

the sentiments are clearly and culturally identifiable with:-

**Student 24, 30 year old female:**

I was working in the bakery and frozen gateaux department which was conveyor belt work. This I found extremely monotonous. This type of work was something I could have done with my eyes shut as there is no real need to think about what you're doing.

The interesting parallel between the two is that one was a male worker at Ford's, on the assembly line, and the Access student was a woman in a bakery, with both identifying the monotony of their respective work roles. It would seem that whether one is producing 'Escorts' or 'gateaux', the **product** becomes an irrelevance, and the **process** is the crucial issue, the ruling monotonous factor. There may be a tendency to see the heavy industrial work of working class men as the ultimate expression of monotony, of alienation, of capitalist exploitation, but concentration on the product, belies the crux of the process, the relationship, or rather 'non-relationship' of the worker to their product. So whether one is screwing nuts on cars or squirting cream on cakes, the difference is found in terms of the physicality of the exercise, the accompanying wages received (both gender issues) rather than in the process of what one is actually doing.

### **Cultural meaning**

It is easy to objectively measure what the worker is doing when they are tightening the nuts or squirting the cream, as Taylor's time and motion concept demonstrated, but it is not so easy to find what the tightening of the screws or squirting of the cream is doing to the worker. Beynon sought to discover what it was doing to the Ford workers through their own words and their own meanings placed on events. Similarly the Chapter on 'Work Profiles', like all of the study, has been attempting to discover what work was doing to the Access students after

their hasty departure from school to get to work. Ironically, though not surprisingly, the most savage criticism of Huw Beynon's study was aimed at his use of the Ford workers' own words and own meanings of their lives.

... Paragraph after paragraph of shop-floor chat is spatchcocked into the text ... as it progresses, its factual content gets smaller and smaller, as its stories get taller and taller. [Lord McCarthy quoted in Beynon, 1984: 11.]

Of course, one wonders just how credible McCarthy's criticism is in terms of its methodological critique of Beynon, and whether the same critique of the methodology would have been mounted had the Ford workers said more positive things about their employment situation. In other words is this not a smokescreen masking the intent to discredit the study, not for how it was done but for what it uncovered? If taken at face value, the counter argument to McCarthy's criticism is of course that to go the other way, the 'scientific' route, then the so-called factual gets taller and taller as the stories get smaller and smaller, leaving one, often with a statistically accurate but culturally meaningless account of people's lives and begging the question raised by Mills ... 'I wonder how true it is. I wonder how much exactitude, or even pseudo-precision, is here confused with 'truth' '. [Mills, 1959.] As Beynon says, 'I have **told the story of other people's experiences**, some of which I shared as an outsider. An outsider who was accepted within.' [Beynon, 1984: 11.] (The emphasis is mine.)

With regards the Access students, their **stories** are of course what matters, as the research seeks to prove through a structural, cultural, familial and biographical morphogenetic understanding of their lives, of their 'journeys', of, as Beynon puts it, 'other people's experiences'. The pre-occupation with so-called scientific objectivity should not distract from the need to find out the meaning of people's lives, in the school, in the work place, in the home, but mostly in their minds, and the structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors that affect their thinking, their decisions, and their lives. The quantitative and qualitative responses in the 'Work Profiles' are supportive of each other, counting the stats, quoting the facts. The monotony, the drudgery and alienation of the negativity of work, expressed in the students' own words, was only relieved by '**working with other people**' as demonstrated by the high response in Section Two. The structural-cultural position of the Access students, their working 'classness' meant that there was little they could do about the situation, faced with the lack of educational qualifications, the need for financial survival, and the opportunity costs involved in risking a move. Of course this is the ordinary cultural lot of working class people, it is why they are working class and go on being so in the great majority of cases.

### **Cultural change**

But things do change as demonstrated in Section Three, 'Reasons

for leaving work'; redundancy, birth of a child, marriage. Clearly, the three factors which prompted leaving are cross-cut by gender lines; redundancy affected both men and women whereas birth of a child and marriage had an impact on women only. For all of the one hundred and seventeen, things were not to remain as they were, by the very fact of them applying for Access, of them wanting to go to university, of their going so totally against their cultural grain.

The 'Work Profiles' have highlighted not only the negativity of the students' experience of that cultural cul-de-sac, but also how it may be broken down by other factors, such as voluntary or compulsory redundancy, or changes in marital/familial status. So if we aggregate the change factors into two distinct groups, 'anticipated change' and 'non-anticipated change' (crisis), the number of students within each group can be quantified. (Table 21 and Table 22). Finally aggregating all of the factors in both 'anticipated' and 'non-anticipated' (crisis) categories we can further quantify the number and type of student responses. (Table 23)

Thus, in the 'Work Profiles' Chapter, twenty five students have identified either change or crisis accounting for leaving work, eight in the crisis mode and seventeen in the change mode. As stated earlier in the Chapter there are clear gender connotations here, with nothing but women comprising the change categories (either by leaving work to get married or to have

children). This is an important early pattern to have established, and one that continues in Chapter Five, 'Personal Profiles' when students give actual reasons for starting Access. The change category remains solely the domain of female students whereas the crisis category is divided between both men and women in the proportions one third and two thirds respectively, in terms of overall student numbers.

**Table 21**    **Reasons for Leaving Work: Anticipated Change**  
**Category: All factors. Data collected 1992-94**

		Age							
		21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
<b>Birth of child.</b>									
Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Female	3	2	3	6	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Marriage</b>									
Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Female	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Total	3	2	4	6	1	1	0	0	0
<b>Total male students</b>									
				0					
<b>Total female students</b>									
				17					
<b>Total all students</b>									
				17					

The cultural meaning of work to working class people is that they have to be employed in order to survive. The difference is



that unlike middle class people there is much less choice, there is much less notion of a career involved with their work, probably a much reduced income, less job satisfaction derived. Thus the cultural meaning of school was 'something I had to go through' before I go to work in an office, shop or factory, which represents 'something that comes next'. The difference between the two social classes is the much more limited cultural choice of working class people.

**Table 22**   **Reasons for Leaving Work: Non-anticipated Change**  
**Category: All factors. Data collected 1992-94**

		Age							
		21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
<b>Redundancy</b>									
Male	0	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	
Female	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	
Total	0	3	0	2	2	1	0	0	
Total male students				5					
Total female students				3					
Total all students				8					

The penalties of being a member of a culturally disadvantaged collectivity include what could be referred to as 'secondary disadvantage', that is one's choices and options of doing something about one's situation are restricted by one's primary disadvantaged state. The opportunity costs for instance of a

**Table 23 Reasons for Leaving Work: Anticipated and Non-anticipated change (crisis) categories: data collected 1992-94.**

	Age							
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
<b>Redundancy</b>								
Male	0	2	0	1	2	0	0	0
Female	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
<b>Birth of child.</b>								
Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Female	3	2	3	6	0	0	0	0
<b>Marriage</b>								
Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Female	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
Total	3	5	4	8	3	2	0	0
<b>Total male students</b>								
				5				
<b>Total female students</b>								
				20				
<b>Total all students</b>								
				25				

working class person undertaking an Access course, for potential entry to university, are much higher than for say a sixteen year old middle class person undertaking A levels for potential entry to university. Both have opportunity costs to consider, which of course are relative to some degree to both parties, but nevertheless fewer mature working class people take the academic plunge, when all things financial, personal and cultural are considered.

The problem of work, is one of monotony, boredom, alienation; the problem of correcting it is one of money, of survival. Even amidst the negativity of it all, as was evident in the student statements, few would leave work willingly without prompting. For women in the study, the cultural aspects of their gender defined roles of housewife/mother, means that the prompts were to get married and to have children, whereas for men in the study, the cultural aspects of gender defined breadwinner role could only be overcome to a degree by the offer of redundancy payments. If education constituted a 'push factor' to leave school and go to work, and work for working class teenagers, a 'pull factor', due to the desire to leave school and the lure of wages, then work itself soon becomes a 'push factor', but this time offering no cultural escape. One can hardly say when one is twenty or so that 'I've made a big mistake, can I please go back to school', although in essence this may be what students are saying in more complex terms when they decide to undertake Access. For most the 'delayed cultural reaction' spoken of earlier, comes too late, since their lives are often entrenched in the cultural morass of marriage, mortgage, children, etc. For most the dream is held in check, with a realistic acknowledgement that it may never be fulfilled, as demonstrated by the Access students and by Beynon's Ford workers.

Work of any kind can become routinised, and working class work, even more so, by nature of its repetitive, monotonous, mentally

dissatisfying, manual chores. So be it production line or gateaux line, the line is the thing, the number of screws fitted or blobs of cream squirted, can eat away at the years. Aspirations may lie dormant for many years but once awakened by structural or/and cultural and/or familial and/or biographical change, fairy tales, and the 'stuff of dreams' can change into reality. As most children are aware, princes come in all shapes and sizes, and what appears at first to be a slimy green amphibian can take on royal princely properties when touching or being touched by the person desiring change. One way out for working class women, anticipated change, marriage, children, one way out for working class men and women, non-anticipated change (crisis), redundancy.

Their experience of work, in relation to other aspects of their anticipated cultural path, such as marriage, children, a home of their own, financial and personal commitments, was to set the seed ultimately for whether their journey would stick to the culturally straight and narrow or whether it would significantly digress from expected cultural tracks. The fact that they applied to Access, that they wish to enter university, clearly suggests, that the 'regular path' was quit, either due to not providing mental satisfaction and stability, or because diversion was prompted by other events in their lives, as part of the unfolding story. In the morphogenetic sense, Yeats was indeed right that 'the centre cannot hold'. If it did there would by definition be no 'endings', no

'beginnings' and crucially no 'centres' to hold in the first place; 'Central Conflationists' please note.

Chapter Five, 'Personal Profiles' takes up the story line from where 'Work Profiles' ended, 'reasons for leaving work', and looks more closely at the change and crisis factors identified by the students as 'reasons for deciding on Access'. The morphogenesis enters the 'end' phase of the story, where the apathy of school life, the alienation of work, were set aside by the activation of personal change and crisis, producing a cultural somersault of massive proportions.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PERSONAL PROFILES (ENDS)

#### **Introduction: A Change is as Good as a Rest**

The two previous chapters, 'Education Profiles' and 'Work Profiles', saw a 'beginning' and a 'middle' to our journey. The 'Personal Profiles', provide the 'end' and also the foundations of a 'new beginning'. From apathy and acceptance at school, to alienation at work, to activation, namely wanting to do something about it. Activation comes in the form of anticipated change or non-anticipated change (crisis). It would seem that without either of these 'activators', the cultural/biographical status quo may have been unaffected to the degree that it was by the desire to enter university.

Clearly within our structural cultural living pattern, there may be moments of 'taking stock', of wanting change, but on the 'treadmill' of it all, the moment passes by, the dream cocooned, another day commences. Were the feelings of discontentment strong enough to remain at the end of the day unquenched by the 'everydayness' of living, and serious consideration of changing dreams into reality, there is still the issue of opportunity costs to grapple with. Change involves risks, both personal and financial.

Regarding the decision to undertake Access, clearly students take enormous risks when making the decision to join the

Course. Both the decision and the opportunity costs which are met need to be understood in relation to significant personal changes already occurring prior to course enrolment. At the time of enrolling, the majority of students were experiencing personal cultural transformation anyway, in the form of anticipated change or crisis, and as such can be seen as going with the flow, their biographical moment. In essence they were already thrown off the 'conveyor belt' (unanticipated change) or at least one foot on and one off (anticipated change). In other words when it came to the moment of decision they had moved quickly, as is so often the case in difficult personal decisions.

### **Monastic Retreats; A Change is as Good as a Rest**

Thus, the impetus for change, is significantly, that change has already started anyway, by crisis, non-anticipated change, such as, redundancy, ill-health, marital breakdown, death in the family, or by accepted cultural detours, that is anticipated changes such as children settled at school or children left home. Such moments, either way, seem to be at the core of why people join Access. From being 'in-it', to being 'out-of-it', seems to be the message behind the movement. By 'in it' I mean, in a state of 'cultural normality', 'non-anomie', if you like, to a state of 'out-of-it', 'cultural normlessness', 'personal anomie'. There is time to reflect, reason to reflect and less to restrain.

In Chapter One, we considered the notion of aeonic time, of people making sense of their own lives midst the complexity and control of structural cultural factors, operating within a chronological time span. In that discussion we considered Dennis Potter's 'Singing Detective' and the significance of individuals garnering clues about themselves through crisis and change, feeling temporarily suspended from the everyday routinisation of time and order. In the interview with critic, Alan Yentob, Potter expands further on 'Marlow's' health crisis and the implications for an in-depth self-analysis, due to a lengthy stay in hospital.

**Yentob:**

Do you feel that in order to find this self, this sovereign self, that you have to retreat from the material world. I'm wondering here if your illness is a factor in this, because you've used the analogy of retreat, a monastic analogy to describe life in a ward, in a hospital ward?

**Potter:**

That was only using the hospital in a sense of the, in the proper use of the word, retreat, that is a withdrawal not in order to disavow, but in order to understand, in order to return to the world with a better equipment. It is undeniable if you are in hospital for along time, and you see it in the other patients, you see that odd, slightly menacing, weird, process, beginning to grow in them, where the outside world is seen as something else, for the first time. And to deal with the crisis of illness or whatever, and having most of them say, having had to go to work everyday, to meet certain commitments, all through life. No time to sit and think, or lie and think, and that lying and thinking and dealing with crisis at the same time means that you've been separated from the normal churning process of life, into this monk-like, semi-seclusion. [Potter, BB2 Television: 1987.]

In Chapter One we also contrasted the work of Potter with R.D, Laing, in terms of the aeonic and calendrical time concepts.



Their work can be contrasted further in terms of 'getting away from it all', when Laing looking at the notion of a personal crisis, a 'journey', states:-

One would hope that society will set up places whose express purpose would be to help people through the stormy passages of such a voyage. A considerable part of this book has been devoted to showing why this is unlikely. [Laing, p. 137. 1967.]

In the sixties Laing did in fact set up such a place, 'Kingsley Hall' in London, acclaimed by some, criticised by others. One would have thought that such places could not work anyway, and any institution, formally established as a haven from the artificial formality of it all, would in reality be a contradiction in terms, becoming contaminated by the very nature of its formality, using Laing against Laing. It would be something akin to the British Anarchist Society (having both name, address with postal code, and presumably Publicity Officer). Informally though, such places do exist, have always existed, in the cultural complexity and richness of society and the people who constitute it. Society may provide the nettles but it also provides the dock leaves.

In 'The Singing Detective' Potter's hero, Marlow, finds his place, his peace in a very formal, very orthodox, very ordinary, hospital ward. It was not set aside for such a purpose, it became the right time and right place for Marlow. Peter Berger, discussing Weber's concept of 'elective affinity' describes it thus, 'the process by which certain ideas and

certain social groups as it were 'seek each other out' in history'. [Berger, 1976: 43.]

Weber's concept, appears to be a very significant factor in history, in society, in human lives, in social and personal change. So when Laing expresses a hope 'that society will set up places' for people to find themselves, away from the cause of their confused and crisis state **it may be that the cause of personal transformations is also precisely the place where the transformation can be realised, in the thick of it all. People find themselves finding themselves in the strangest places, on mountain tops, looking at shore lines, in the hustle and bustle of the teeming metropolis, in the wilderness, in the marriage, in the divorce, in the job, in the redundancy, in the children being born , in the children leaving home, in the Access class.**

Thus, monastic retreats can take many forms, and may in fact appear to be the exact opposite to the tranquillity of the monastery, as in the case of a period of acute illness in hospital, or redundancy, marital breakdown, mental breakdown, as monastic crises so-to-speak, or children settled at school, children left home, as monastic changes. The key point, in line with Potter's idea, is the notion of being 'out-of-it' for a time, no matter what the circumstances, it still gives time to think, time for meditation, time to take stock. Indeed, the more devastating the crisis, the more the person is taken out-of-themselves by being taken-out-of-it, whether 'it' stands for

the structural, the cultural, or familial commitments and constraints. Thus, such places as Laing calls for already exist and in its own way Access can be seen as such a place, not because of what it is, but because it was there, as the right idea, at the right time, for the right people. This Chapter attempts to understand through the students' own words 'what happened' and 'why Access?'

The question on the application form was: 'On this page please write an account of why you want to do Access, why you are in a position to undertake the Course at the present time and how it fits in with your life situation; how this relates to your previous occupational, educational and other life experience'. The 'Personal Profiles' are divided into two sections; Section One, 'Anticipated life changes', and Section Two, 'Non-anticipated life changes'(Crises). Each section contains a number of factors broken down as follows:-

**SECTION ONE:      ANTICIPATED LIFE CHANGES**

- F1      Children starting/settled at school.
- F2      Children left school.
- F3      Children left home.
- F4      Living with someone.
- F5      Moving house.

**SECTION TWO:      NON-ANTICIPATED LIFE CHANGES (CRISES)**

- G1      Broken relationship
- G2      Redundancy
- G3      Illness
- G4      Death of relative

Having established the format for investigation, we look at

'anticipated life changes', examining the quantitative results first. Table 24 gives the total number of responses for each factor and Table 25 provides an analysis of the first factor 'children started/settled at school (F1).

**SECTION ONE: ANTICIPATED LIFE CHANGES**

**Table 24: Anticipated life changes; total number of responses, all categories. Data collected 1992-94**

F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Children settled at school	Children left school	Children left home	Living with someone	Moving house
Number of responses:				
28	4	5	1	1

**SECTION ONE: ANTICIPATED LIFE CHANGES**

**Table 25: First Factor: Children started/settled at school F1 Data collected 1992-94**

	Age							
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Female	5	5	8	9	0	1	0	0
Total	5	5	8	9	0	1	0	0
Total male students 0								
Total female students 28								
Total all students 28								

The glaring feature of the figures is obviously, the total is a female total. No male students mentioned that their children were now settled at school, enabling them to consider their own future. As with other areas in the research the responses of the women are printed in full, all of them, demonstrating by reading one after another, what the issue really means; how one human being's self-realisation is suspended waiting for others to start finding their own. Maternity leave for many women can mean a lifetime, and the longer it continues the harder it may be to return to other areas of life, resuming their own personal journeys. Clearly we know that choice inheres in their situation, but that choosing entails, structural, cultural and familial pressures and constraints which bear down heavily on women's shoulders, restricting choices because of the opportunity costs they represent. After reading the twenty eight responses, you tend to move into the abstract, with a very heightened awareness of what it means to be 'woman', of what it means to be 'mother'. (I have emphasised key words and phrases relating to the issues under consideration.)

**Student No. 2. 37 year old black female.**

Being at home over the past few years has been wonderful, having the time with my family without the pressures of work. It has given me the opportunity to spend some valuable time with **my daughter who is about to start full-time school**, and my son who is thirteen ... I feel I need some academic stimulation. I feel I need to feel mentally alive again. I cannot see myself just sitting at home vegetating day after day waiting for my family to come home. I want to do this course.

**Student No. 9. 28 year old female.**

**My two oldest children will both be in full-time education in September and therefore I only have my youngest daughter at home. When I discovered that the College has a nursery facility I felt that I really had to go for it.**

**Student No. 10. 37 year old female.**

**But I don't want a job or jobs anymore just because they're needed, my sons are growing up and both at school - what about me.**

**Student No. 13. 25 year old female.**

**My eldest daughter starts school in September so I feel it is the right time for me to do something positive about mine and my children's future.**

**Student No. 17. 25 year old female.**

**I feel that now - September, would be the perfect time for me to undertake the course as at present I am at home with my son and I have plenty of time to study. I already have someone who will look after my son if I am accepted onto the course.**

**Student No. 19. 29 year old female.**

**My family are behind me in my plans for the future and my child is well looked after for me.**

**Student No. 21. 40 year old female.**

**I am now in a position to undertake full-time education as my children are aged 12 and 16 years - not totally dependent on me anymore.**

**Student No. 22. 40 year old female.**

**In a few years my children will be doing their own thing and I feel I have to find a new life style for myself before this happens.**

**Student No. 25. 32 year old female.**

I am in a position to take this course as one child is at school now and the other child starts nursery in September.

**Student No. 38. 37 year old female.**

I am now 37 years of age, and I have a six year old son. As he is at school I feel that I have the opportunity for a second chance to try for the educational qualifications that I now realise I had always wanted.

**Student No. 40. 37 year old black female.**

Now that my children are in school full-time, I am able to study better in the day time and concentrate on what I have to do.

**Student No. 42. 25 year old female.**

Now that my children are getting older and are not so dependent on me, I want to take my first chance of beginning my own life, as I don't want to be left behind.

**Student No. 47. 27 year old female.**

My son is now 4½ and ready to start school in September.

**Student No. 48. 23 year old female.**

My son is now 3½ years old and it is time to do something with my life.

**Student No. 63. 36 year old female.**

My children are at an age where they are gaining independence, which in turn, allows me to feel ready to meet this new challenge.

**Student No. 69. 40 year old female.**

**My son is now 17 years old and doing his A levels. He doesn't need me now so much so I have lots of time free.**

**Student No. 70. 29 year old female.**

**I've decided it's time to do something to improve my situation and move on from being a stay at home mum.**

**Student No. 71. 31 year old female.**

**I am in a good position to begin the course, as my second child will be starting school in September and I have made arrangements for my youngest.**

**Student No. 73. 34 year old female.**

**From September I shall be in a position of a woman returner with both my children at school.**

**Student No. 80. 36 year old black female.**

**I feel that now my children are settled in school I can now devote some of my time to an access course.**

**Student No. 89. 39 year old female.**

**As my son is now 15 years old he is going in his own direction.**

**Student No. 92. 25 year old female.**

**I feel that I am now in a position to undertake this course as my children are both at school now, which will enable me to study without distraction.**

**Student No. 96. 32 year old female.**

**I have a son who is growing up. So feeling my duties as a mother are getting less and having no real direction I have**



decided to try and put what I have as a person ie. such as caring and understanding nature to a professional use.

**Student No. 102. 32 year old female.**

**Both my children are in full-time education, so I have all my day-times free for studying.**

**Student No. 105. 33 year old female.**

**For the last ten years I ahve arranged my life around my family ... Both my children are in full time education so I have all my day times free for studying.**

**Student No. 108. 31 year old female.**

**My son is 5 and started school last September, my daughter is 2½ and goes to Nursery 2 full days a week. I would only need help with child care for the remaining time spent at college. Now my children are old enough to be left, I want to utilise the time to educate myself for returning to work.**

**Student No. 110. 39 year old female.**

**It would seem as I am at home doing only household chores and with a lot of spare time I should take the opportunity to study and improve myself and my prospects. I also find as my children need my attention less I need to have a rewarding role to play and something to fill my life and time.**

**Student No. 112. 28 year old female.**

**After having my two children, I feel, now is the time to carry on with learning.**

The second factor of 'anticipated life changes' moves from children started/settled at school to some years hence when children have left school. Although only four students mentioned 'children leaving school' as a contributory factor

for joining Access, the significance of this factor is that not only were they all female but also their age range 39-45. This would seem to indicate the significance of the age factor in relation to the lasting commitments of gender roles, specifically that of 'motherhood'.

**SECTION ONE: ANTICIPATED LIFE CHANGES**

**Table 26: Second Factor: Children left school**  
**Data collected 1992-94**

	Age							
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Female	0	0	0	2	2	1	0	0
Total	0	0	0	2	2	1	0	0
Total male students	0							
Total female students	5							
Total all students	5							

Their responses:-

**Student No. 20. 39 year old female.**

**My children are grown up and I have the time and enthusiasm to commit myself to a second chance at education.**

**Student No. 52. 45 year old female.**

Although I have known about Access for some years I now feel the time is right for me. **My children are grown up**, I have the enthusiasm and encouragement and support of my husband.

Student No. 91. 43 year old female.

My sons are grown, giving me the freedom to do what I want, and I want to learn all sorts of things.

Student No. 98. 44 year old female.

I can do the course as my children are all grown up.

Student No. 116. 49 year old female.

It is only with my children settled in their careers that I feel able to go ahead.

Clearly the obvious factor here is the age of the women, three in their early forties and one approaching forty, indicating that for some the mother role doesn't necessarily cease when children start or are settled at school, for it may take another fifteen years before they actually leave education before the 'mothers' can take time out to consider their own education. This phenomenon may well have a cultural tint, being more common amongst working class women than middle class women.

It may also be generationally related, in that for instance, newer generations of working class women, due to changes in cultural meanings, perhaps influenced by the 'women's movement', high unemployment levels, etc. are more culturally prone to return to employment, at a much earlier time in their children's childhood, perhaps even before school age by placing the child in a creche. However, with cut backs in welfare

facilities, including local authority nurseries, there may be something of a reversal of this, but clearly all these issues would constitute a morphogenetic investigation in their own right entailing another story altogether.

The importance for this story is that with two categories considered in 'Changes in Family Situation' 'Children settled at school' (F1) and 'Children left school' (F2), all of the thirty three responses have come from women, which would suggest that they may constitute the entirety of those who arrive on Access because of 'anticipated life changes'. The picture is further confirmed when we consider the third factor in the 'anticipated life changes' category, 'children left home'.

#### SECTION ONE: ANTICIPATED LIFE CHANGES

Table 27: Third Factor: Children left home  
Data collected 1992-94

	Age							
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Female	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0
Total	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0

Total male students 0

Total female students 4

Total all students 4

Four women identified the novelty of being able to think about their own future now that their children had left home. Their responses are printed below with my emphasis on key phases.

**Student No. 5. 43 year old female.**

I want to do access as I am now in a position to put myself first. My family are all grown and left home.

**Student No. 18. 48 year old female.**

I am now on my own without any responsibilities and only just beginning to find a belief in myself.

**Student No. 29. 48 year old female.**

I now have no dependants, no real domestic life and the time is ideal to go for a degree.

**Student No. 64. 49 year old female.**

I live alone and no longer have responsibility to anyone.

Four more students, four more women, four more 'mothers'. Clearly for some women, the time for change, their own time and place, does not come when children are settled at school, nor when they leave school, but only when they finally spread their wings and leave the nest. Having now considered three factors of 'anticipated life changes' and all in relation to the changing status of children we have thirty seven responses mentioning 'children starting/settled at school' (F1), 'children left school' (F2) or 'children left home' (F3) as reasons for starting Access and since they are all women the

relationship between gender roles and anticipated life changes as a trigger for Access seems further sustained. The next section considers the effects of starting to live with someone as a contributory factor in making the decision to undertake an Access course.

**SECTION ONE:      ANTICIPATED LIFE CHANGES**

**Fourth Factor:    Living with someone (F4)**

Only one student identified this as a factor in her decision to undertake Access. She said:-

**Student No. 74.   25 year old female.**

I feel the Access course would fit in well with my life at present and the future. At the moment I am buying a house with my partner who is very supportive to my studies. This will provide me with a quiet place to study.

It may be a more positive feature of relationships, the fact that deciding to live with someone is seen as an asset to studying for a degree, but this sole case needs to be seen in relation to the twenty who were applying to Access, in part, due to marital/relationship breakdown in Section Two, 'non-anticipated life changes'. Some 'cautionary tales' here though regarding conjugal roles; firstly although Student 74 saw her partner as being 'very supportive to (her) studies' it may be that such a situation is not to the norm and indeed one wonders whether indeed the reverse may be the case in many other relationships where the female partner decides to undertake an educational course involving such commitment as does an Access

programme. That no other women mentioned their partners being supportive to their studies may further prove the point although it should also be stated that none of the male students mentioned the support of their partners either.

The other factor in Student 74's response is that she mentioned her supportive partner in relation to buying a house with him and this also have gender connotations since it may be very difficult indeed for many working class women to consider buying a house in their own right due to their poor status in the job market. Such an issue is relevant to the last factor in the section on 'anticipated life changes', 'Moving house' (F5).

## SECTION TWO:    ANTICIPATED LIFE CHANGES

### Fifth Factor:   F5:   Moving house

One student mentioned moving as a factor which made her consider returning to education. This is contained within the anticipated change section since the decision to move was related to her husband's work, and just as women have to accomodate the changes of their children's lives within their own life situation, the same appears to be the case for women in relation to their husband's work situation, a career move instigating physical movement for the the whole family.

#### **Student No. 9.   28 year old female**

**I had to give up my last position in April because we moved to Coventry for my husband's job. I now feel that this would be an ideal opportunity to re-start my education whilst I have been forced out of work. (The stress is mine.)**

The 'move' of course was brought about by her husband's employment 'move', and although a single case in this population, is probably repeated in great numbers throughout society. It reflects again, the seemingly 'subservient' role that women play to their husbands, (and their children) due to the cultural meaning of the gender socialisation process, probably even more significant in working class life due to women occupying non-professional occupations unlike their middle class counterparts.

Aggregating all five categories under the anticipated life change section i.e., 'Children settled at school', F1, 'Children left school' F2, 'Children left home', F3, 'Living with someone' F4 and 'Moving house' F5, it is clear that these changes are the domain of women, all thirty nine responses coming from female students. Since such changes are not of the 'crisis' kind, being 'anticipated life changes' rather than 'non-anticipated life changes' such as redundancy, marital breakdown, ill-health etc, then one aspect of the thesis seems wholly answered and sustained, by notion of gender roles. Clearly, gender socialisation, and the culturally accepted and biographically anticipated changes of the process is one morphogenetic story, and does 'affect mature female students' decisions to undertake an Open Access course for possible entry to university'.

However, since the Access women have more than one cultural



socialised affiliation, their social class, then the development of the thesis title to accommodate, the 'anticipated life changes' factor would read thus, 'Journeys: A study of the interplay between structural, cultural, familial, and biographical factors affecting mature working class female students' decisions to undertake an Open Access course for possible entry to university'.

Thus, gender roles, and the division of labour along gender lines, are important parts/processes of our **social structure**, (the 'war between men and women' as James Thurber called it), and within that structural set-up, women's cultural specifics are different to men's, but the cultural picture is further bisected by cultural differences between the classes, especially working class and middle class. Finally, as with cultural boundaries, **familial** cultural patterns are also important, affecting both women and men but in different ways. In terms of education prospects and employment opportunities, most writers seem to agree that, having the primary roles of housewife and mother, women are seriously disadvantaged in both educational and employment opportunities. [Caplow, 1954. Rowbotham, 1973. Oakley, 1974. Sharpe, 1976. Bernard, 1976. and a host of others.]

In 'Section Two', of the students 'Personal Profiles' and their reasons for undertaking Access, we move from 'anticipated life changes' to times of crisis, that is times when personal change

was of the unanticipated kind. The quantitative picture of the all the responses for all the factors in this category is provided in Table 28, followed by a quantitative breakdown of the first factor, 'Broken relationship' (Table 29).

**SECTION TWO: NON-ANTICIPATED LIFE CHANGES (CRISES)**

**Table 28: Non-anticipated life changes (crises); total number of responses, all categories**

**Data collected 1992-94**

G1	G2	G3	G4
Broken relationship	Redundancy	Illness	Death of relative
Number of responses:			
25	25	6	3

**SECTION TWO: NON-ANTICIPATED LIFE CHANGES**

**Table 29: First Factor: Broken relationship**  
**Data collected 1992-94**

		Age							
		21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male		0	0	2	3	2	0	0	0
Female		3	4	3	3	4	1	0	0
Total		3	4	5	6	6	1	0	0
Total male students		7							
Total female students		18							
Total all students		25							

The first issue to identify is that the student responses are divided by gender, two thirds women and one third men, which actually reflects the approximate percentage gender breakdown of the total number of students who completed application forms for Access. The two thirds one third gender division tends to be pretty similar each year and is a reflection of the availability of opportunity to enrol on the Course with regards the commitment of the 'breadwinner' role of the man and the 'housewife/mother' of the woman, discussed earlier. To reiterate the substance of the argument, few working class men would actually leave full-time paid employment to enrol on Access, the opportunity costs being much too high, acknowledging that their income represents the main money coming into the home. As was discussed earlier in the research, unemployment/redundancy would provide working class men with the opportunity to think about further education, since part of the decision to leave paid employment, has already been taken for them by their employer.

This does not mean to say however, that all working class men facing a redundancy situation, would think about further education as a preparation for higher education, in fact only a very small minority do, making them distinctive, rather than the general, as was also the case with working class women with children settled in school etc, discussed above. Clearly in both categories other issues are at work and will be returned to later in the Chapter as other factors in the students'

'Personal Profiles' are analysed, developing a fuller picture of situational constraints and enablements. Firstly, a review of what the students', both women and men, were saying about the breakdown of their relationship and its bearings on the decision to undertake an Access Course as preparation for University. As with the First Factor of the 'Personal Profiles' 'Changes In Family Situation', all of the responses for 'Broken Relationship' are printed, so crucial is it to the understanding of why 'non-anticipated changes', i.e. 'crises', affect people's decisions to re-enter education. (The stress is mine.)

**Student No. 3. 32 year old female.**

The changes my life has gone through in the last year ranges from full-time employment to being a full-time mother/housewife and from being married to being separated.

**Student No. 5. 43 year old female.**

I was a battered wife so I can relate to other people about this. I brought up three children by myself for sixteen years so I know about managing money, a home, problems of all kinds.

**Student No. 6. 37 year old male.**

I am at the most crucial turning point in my life. My business is gone - my wife has gone and I am just getting over a period of illness.

**Student No. 11. 45 year old male.**

My marriage is going through a major crisis and is in grave danger of coming to an end.

**Student No. 13. 24 year old female.**

As I am a single parent with two young daughters it is up to me to provide for them and I feel the best way for me to do that is by doing this Access course.

**Student No. 17. 25 year old female.**

I feel that now, September, would be the perfect time for me to undertake the course as at present I am at home with my son and I have plenty of time to study. During the last eight months as a single mother on Income Support I understand how some people find themselves unable to cope and need external help.

**Student No. 19. 29 year old female.**

I am a single parent, my daughter is looked after by my mother during the day.

**Student No. 22. 40 year old female.**

I am now divorced and have two children to support.

**Student No. 23. 45 year old male.**

However, in 1987, my wife and I separated.

**Student No. 26. 28 year old female.**

I am a single-parent and obviously at the age of 28 years I feel I have a lot of experience in life and social situations.

**Student No. 28. 38 year old male.**

My ultimate aim is to get back with my wife, from whom I separated two years ago.

**Student No. 37. 23 year old black female.**

Well I was sixteen years old when I left home. I had a hell of

a lot of hassle for a couple of years. I've lived in two battered women's homes due to the breakdown of my relationship.

**Student No. 39. 32 year old male.**

In 1989 I ran down the business as a personal relationship had ended and I have been unemployed since then.

**Student No. 60. 38 year old female.**

I feel at present that it is important for me being a one-parent family to educate myself on the Access Course, to improve my education so that I am move on to University and gain a degree.

**Student No. 63. 46 year old female.**

Because of the direction my personal life too, early in my career, through entering into a marriage which was in serious difficulty from the outset, any difficulties I encountered in my job were compounded, and I therefore, often feel inadequate and dissatisfied. I want to do Access because I have felt, for quite some time, that I need a new direction in life. Eventually because of the intensity of my marital problems, I was forced to stop and assess my entire situation.

**Student No. 69. 40 year old female.**

I am a single parent and my son is now 17 years old, and doing his A levels. He doesn't need me so much so I have lots of free time.

**Student No. 70. 30 year old female.**

As a now divorced mother of three and after a lot of soul searching I've decided it's time to do something to improve my situation and move on from being a stay at home mum.

**Student No. 81. 37 year old male.**

I am single and have been since divorcing in 1985/86 I do not have family commitments and I feel able devote time to studies.

**Student No. 91. 34 year old female.**

**My marriage has, thankfully, ended, and although I am a single parent, my sons are growing, giving me the freedom to do what I want.**

**Student No. 94. 33 year old female.**

**By the time I was eighteen I had given birth to two children and lived in a violent relationship with their father, whom I left before I was twenty.**

**Student No. 106. 33 year old male.**

**When both my marriage and my job finished I think that society had demanded too much of me, all I wanted was to smash the mould that had had me from birth.**

**Student No. 110. 39 year old female.**

**Since my divorce I have had to become more independent and take a serious look at where my life is going.**

Three other students also told me during interviews to join Access that they had also had marital breakdowns, **Student 10, 37 year old female, Student 24, 30 year old female, and Student 55, 33 year old female.** Thus, twenty five students had experienced a breakdown in a relationship prior to joining Access, a trail of personal devastation by any standards, clearly having a huge impact on the person's life meaning and future intentions/aspirations. Quite a number of students mention their broken relationship alongside other factors, such as children growing up, losing work, single-parenthood, providing us with further 'socio-cultural' clues perhaps as to the specifics of the situation. It may be with 'non-anticipated

changes', that in some instances, more than one 'crisis' more than one 'break' is needed to shake the cultural foundations of the person's life situation, where in essence nothing is left but to form a new life, and preferably distinct from the old version which let them down so badly.

One could suggest that such personal tragedies are like a negative version of a working class person winning the football pools or more recently the 'National Lottery' so devastating are the life changes which either can bring about. Rather than 'Spend, Spend, Spend' the famous autobiography of working class pools winner, Viv Nicholson, the message from the Access draw, is more one of 'Mend, Mend, Mend', with the 'anticipated' new life changes, via Access, acting as a healing agent for the devastation wrought by the 'non-anticipated' changes that were the catalyst for taking stock. One could even argue the case that with so much going wrong in people's lives, with the cultural, familial picture not holding, then why not try something totally new, something that goes totally against the cultural grain, and decide on University, as the old working class adage goes, 'in for a penny, in for a pound'.

There will obviously be a need to return to these issues later in the chapter, but there is still need to investigate more categories before a fuller picture can emerge. The Second Factor of 'non-anticipated life changes' considers



'redundancy/unemployment (G2) as a reason for enrolling on an Access course. The quantitative results first:-

**SECTION TWO: NON-ANTICIPATED LIFE CHANGES (CRISES)**

**Table 30 Second Factor: Redundancy/Unemployment (G2)**  
**Data Collected 1992-94**

	Age							
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male	2	5	1	3	4	0	0	0
Female	4	0	3	1	0	0	0	0
Total	6	5	4	4	4	0	0	0
Total male students	15							
Total female students	8							
Total all students	23							

Of the twenty three responses, thirteen mentioned redundancy, one mentioned business collapse, one mentioned losing a job and the remaining ten mentioned that they were unemployed at the time of applying for Access. As was discussed in the 'Work Profiles' Chapter, the key issue, of whether an unemployed state is an anticipated or non-anticipated life change, does not relate solely to whether a person left a job voluntarily, was made compulsorally redundant or was dismissed, since by definition the 'unemployed' state represents a crisis of kinds, because it would not normally be considered a desirable

life strategy. Furthermore, the fact that the students actually mentioned on their Access application forms that they were unemployed, or were made redundant, or volunteered for redundancy, means that they saw it as an anomic state, as a reason for applying to Access.

It could be argued that 'compulsory redundancy' or being sacked is more pertinent to the category of non-anticipated life changes (crisis) than voluntary redundancy, or merely deciding to leave a job, but the issue can be seen as representing a continuum, since voluntarily to terminate one's employment, or to accept redundancy, implies that one was not happy with one's situation and could not continue with it any longer. The figures for those those who mentioned redundancy, voluntary or otherwise, can be divided between two thirds men and one third women, which is a near total reversal of the overall gender divide of student numbers, i.e. two thirds women and one third men. Clearly, the 'breadwinner' role comes into play here, with redundancy, providing some men with an 'escape route' into 'better things', now that the opportunity costs have been greatly reduced by the action of their employer, by either enforcing redundancy or offering redundancy to their workers. However, the figures also demonstrate that a sudden loss of paid employment is not just a problem for men. The response of the thirteen who mentioned the word redundancy and the student who experienced his own business collapse are printed below, with bold type highlighting the appropriate terminology.

**Student No. 1. 25 year old Asian female.**

Recently I **was made redundant** and am currently unemployed. the chances of me finding work are quite slim because of my lack of qualifications and work experience.

**Student No. 6. 37 year old male.**

I am at the most crucial turning point in my life **my business is gone.**

**Student No. 11. 45 year old male.**

**But due to redundancy this came to an end in 1983.**

**Student No. 12. 25 year old black female.**

**I lost my job recently.**

**Student No. 14. 27 year old male.**

I pursued another area of work and found a position in a small engineering company. after only one month I found the job very tedious and totally unstimulating. Eventually I **was made redundant.**

**Student No. 21. 40 year old female.**

During the last 9 months, that is since being made redundant from the Building Society, I have given a lot of thought to my future. On applying for the 5 or 6 jobs after leaving the Building Society and being unsuccessful, I quickly realised that what I had to offer employers, so many others did too, and I felt I was capable of doing something better. At the same time **my husband became unemployed** and at first the thought of no income from either of us was frightening, however, we have managed so far and I **think it was the push I needed.**

**Student No. 23. 44 year old male.**

In November 1991, two colleagues and myself, out of a compliment of 80 drivers, **accepted voluntary redundancy.**

**Student No. 36. 37 year old male.**

**I was made compulsory redundant** in November 1991 and have not worked since.

**Student No. 72. 45 year old male.**

After working for in car factory for 29 years **I was made redundant.** this was a time to take stock of my life and look for a change of direction.

**Student No. 73. 34 year old female.**

As a family we are **faced with a redundancy situation** shortly I want to act positively for us all; but especially for me.

**Student No. 81. 37 year old male.**

Being unemployed has focussed my eyes on the future and a return to the monotony of factory life is to painful to contemplate.

**Student No. 82. 26 year old male.**

When the **organisation folded** I found myself feeling **insecure and unanchored.** For the next year I 'drifted' in my life.

**Student No. 99. 41 year old male.**

However in 1986 **I was made redundant.** After six months on the dole I got another job again in an engineering company and I stayed there for five years until **I was made redundant again.**

**Student No. 102. 33 year old female.**

Since March **I have been redundant** and have had lots of time to think about my future and returning to employment or education. I feel very strongly that it is **the right time to embark on a Course to prepare me for my future.**

The remaining nine students mentioned unemployment or losing a job. Their responses highlight the arguments above relating to the issue of unemployment, voluntarily undertaken or otherwise, being a crisis of kinds.

**Student No. 15. 21 year old male.**

**I have been unemployed for nearly a year now during which time I have had plenty of time to take stock of my life and realise that I want a complete career change.**

**Student No. 17. 25 year old female.**

**I am now unemployed and on income support and feel that this is the time in my life when I am ready to undertake such a course both emotionally and financially.**

**Student No. 30. 30 year old male.**

The job became a nightmare everything went wrong about work, repetition, low wages, no acknowledgement of initiative became too much and after eight months **I walked out ...** Hopefully by completing the Access course and going on to do a degree this will lead to a more rewarding and spiritually uplifting type of employment.

**Student No. 34. 28 year old male.**

My wish to do this course does not really relate to any of my previous occupational experiences, but then I want to totally change the type of work that I am qualified for ... As for why I am in a position to do this course, **like more than three million other people I am not in employment.**

**Student No. 39. 31 year old male.**

**I am presently unemployed although I feel I have had many valuable experiences in the past.**

Student No. 59. 21 year old male.

I am in the position to start Access as I am unemployed and have no family commitments.

Student No. 76. 29 year old male.

I am at the moment unemployed ... The course relates to my previous occupations only in that it will help me greatly to get away from it.

Student No. 95. 34 year old female.

I am unemployed presently and have been for eight years so I feel the time is right, and having too much time on my hands and wasting it.

Student No. 104. 23 year old female.

At the moment I am unemployed but have just started voluntary work at a local school.

In the 'Work Profiles' Chapter, Section Three, 'Reasons for leaving work' eight students mentioned that they had either volunteered for or were made redundant. Five of these students also responded to redundancy in their 'reasons for doing Access', student numbers, 14, 21, 81, 99, and 108. If we now add the remaining three students who mentioned redundancy in their 'Work Profiles' but not in their 'Personal Profiles', numbers, 20, 23, and 82, the total figure for all students mentioning redundancy or unemployment in their application forms is twenty eight.

Some patterns are now beginning to emerge, in relation to 'non-

anticipated life changes'. For instance the reversal of male/female ratios for 'Redundancy', are even more significant when we compare them with 'anticipated life changes' such as 'Children starting/settled at school', (F1), 'Children left school', (F2), and 'Children left home', (F3), because all responses in all three categories come from women. In the middle ground, reflecting the overall ratio of men and women who completed the applications forms, was '**Broken relationship**' H1, where there was a ratio of two women to one man. (Plus the one female response in the '**Living with someone**' category, N2.)

First conclusions at this stage of the analysis of 'Personal Profiles' seem to suggest that, 'Changes in family situation' is a change that affects women; 'Changes in Relationship' affects men and women in relation to application ratios proportionate to gender; and finally, 'Changes in work situation', reverse the application ratios, to approximately two thirds men and one third women. These first correlations appear highly reflective of structural, cultural and familial factors affecting men and women overall in society, and affecting why they decide to join Access in particular.

The Third Factor of 'non-anticipated life changes' looks at the issue of 'illness' (G3). It may be that the person applying to Access suffered illness or that a member of their family was ill but since the research is based on what the students themselves consider to be significant in their application to

join Access then the fact that they chose to mention illness on their application form under the section 'reasons for doing Access' must mean that it bears relevance to their application. The quantitative results first:-

**SECTION TWO: NON-ANTICIPATED LIFE CHANGES (CRISES)**

**Table 31 Third Factor: Illness (G3)**  
**Data collected 1992-94**

	Age							
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Female	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	2	2	0	1	1	0	0	0
Total male students	3							
Total female students	3							
Total all students	6							

The numbers are evenly divided between men and women. Probably too few responses to draw any significant analysis from. Nevertheless, Potter's notion of illness, Marlow's psoriasis, as a factor in personal change, is worth remembering at this point. One other point worth noting is the statement by Student 74, who had looked after her mother and clearly there might be gender issues to consider here in terms of 'women' in the caring role, the nursing role when there is illness in the



family. These issues are analysed further in Chapter Seven, 'Affinities', where based in part on the students' application form details and part on a series of informal interviews I investigate further the significance of change or/and crisis affecting people's decision to join an Access course. Student 74's case is one that is looked at in more depth in Chapter Seven.

The responses of the six students who mentioned illness on their application forms:-

**Student No. 1. 25 year old Asian female.**

I have also suffered from great deal of stress and what is known as chronic fatigue syndrome which is brought on by high pressure and stress caused by a lack of purpose in life. I feel its time to be rid of these feelings and to do something positive with my life.

**Student No. 6. 37 year old male.**

Why do I want to do it? I am at this most crucial point in my life. My Business is gone - my wife has gone and I am just getting over a period of illness.

**Student No. 11. 45 year old male.**

Since leaving my last job in November last year through frustration and ill health I have tried to re-evaluate my life and where it is going. I have had serious health problems over the past two years which since surgery have now been resolved.

**Student No. 27. 28 year old male.**

(suffered with drug and alcohol addiction.)

**Student No. 43. 26 six year old female.**

As a child I suffered with a terrible phobia which made growing up very difficult at times. During all the suffering I found that there was nobody who could really help me and feel that I really cured myself. from it in the end, after many years of misery. As I matured myself I have always had a dream that one day I would work with children in this area and I feel that through Access, I would finally be taking the first step in to making this reality

**Student No. 74. 25 year old female.**

Although I will still do a small amount of caring for mum, the majority will be done by carers of whom mum has employed. Being a carer has given me tremendous insight to the needs of people with disabilities. I would like to use the experience I have gained over the years in employment I may gain in the future.

The final section in 'Non-anticipated life changes (crises), considers the impact of the 'Death of a relative', G4.

**SECTION TWO: NON-ANTICIPATED LIFE CHANGES (CRISES)**

**Fourth Factor: Death of relative (G4)**

Three students mentioned the 'death of a relative' as being a significant factor in their decision to join Access, in that they chose to include the information on their application form, under reasons for wanting to undertake Access. The three responses below reflect not only great sadness at how cruel life can be but also the sheer courage and resilience of people, not only to cope, but to become stronger, more determined as demonstrated by their application to join Access and eventually obtain a place at university.

**Student No. 7. 23 year old male.**

I've led an interesting and varied life, at times its been difficult with the death of my mother in 1984 and my father in

the following year. Despite this I have never let life get me down.

**Student No. 22. 40 year old female.**

I've been through quite a lot in the last few years as well as a divorce I lost my 3 year old daughter after open heart surgery and also my father who was only 61.

**Student No. 89. 39 year old male.**

Last year my mother died. It has been a hard year to cope with but I have emerged with a conviction and purpose that I have never felt before.

### Conclusions

Having considered nine factors of life change, five reflecting 'anticipated' and four 'non-anticipated' (crisis), we can arrive at some definitions of possible patterns emerging through aggregating the two groups in tabular form. In all of the following tables it must be remembered that we are considering total student responses to the different factors of anticipated or non-anticipated life changes and not total number of students (since a small number of students have responded to more than one category) which means there will be need for some adjustment of the final statistics of the former (total student responses) to arrive at the final statistics of the latter (total number of students). This is undertaken after a consideration of the tabular aggregates for the total student responses in all factors of anticipated and non-anticipated life changes. First, however there is a reminder of what factors are being categorised as 'non-anticipated life changes' (crises) and 'anticipated life changes' (Table 32).

**Table 32: Categories of anticipated and non-anticipated life changes**

<u>Anticipated Life Changes</u>	<u>Non-anticipated life changes</u>
F1: Children settled at school	G1: Broken relationship
F2: Children left school	G2: Redundancy
F3: Children left home	G3: Illness
F4: Getting married	G4: Death of relative
F5: Moving house	

**Table 33 Anticipated life changes (all factors)**  
**Data collected 1992-94**

	Age															
	21-25		26-30		31-35		36-40		41-45		46-50		51-55		56-60	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Children starting school	0	5	0	5	0	8	0	9	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Children left school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
Children left home	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0
Living someone	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Moving house	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	0	6	0	6	0	8	0	11	0	3	0	5	0	0	0	0
Total	6		6		8		11		3		5		0		0	

Total male student responses: 0

Total female student responses: 39

Total all student response: 39

**Table 34: Cumulative totals of anticipated life change categories. Data collected 1992-94**

**Children Starting/Settled at School**

Total male student responses:	0
Total female student responses:	39
-----	
Total: Child'n. St,Set'd School	39
-----	

**Children Left School**

Total male student responses:	0
Total female student responses:	5
-----	
Total: Children Left School	5
-----	

**Children Left Home**

Total male student responses:	0
Total female student responses:	4
-----	
Total: Children Left Home	4
-----	

**Living With Someone**

Total male student responses:	0
Total female student responses:	1
-----	
Total: Living With Someone	1
-----	

**Moving House**

Total male student responses:	0
Total female student responses:	1
-----	
Total: Moving House	1
-----	

Total male student responses:	All categories	0
Total female student responses:	All categories	39
-----		
Total all student responses: (Anticipated life change)		39
-----		

**Table 35: Non-anticipated life changes (crises)**  
**Data collected 1992-94**

Age														
	21-25		26-30		31-35		36-40		41-45		46-50		51-55	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Broken/ Rel.	0	3	0	4	2	3	3	3	2	4	0	1	0	0
Redund/ ancy	2	4	6	1	1	4	3	1	5	0	0	1	0	0
Illness	0	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Death of Rel.	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	3	9	7	6	3	7	7	6	8	4	0	2	0	0
Comb.Total	12		13		10		13		12		2		0	
Total male student responses: 28														
Total female student responses: 34														
Total all student responses: 62														

**Table 36: Cumulative totals of non-anticipated life change (crisis) categories. Data collected 1992-94**

**Broken Relationship**

Total male student responses:	7
Total female student responses	18
-----	
Total: Broken Relationship	25
-----	

**Death of Relative**

Total male student responses:	1
Total female student responses:	2
-----	
Total: Death of Relative	3
-----	

**Illness**

Total male student responses:	3
Total female student responses	3
-----	
Total: Illness	6
-----	

**Redundancy**

Total male student responses:	17
Total female student responses:	11
-----	
Total: Redundancy	28
-----	

Total male student responses:	All categories	28
Total female student responses:	All categories	34
-----		
Total all student responses:	All categories	62
-----		

**Table 37: Anticipated and Non-anticipated life changes (crises). Data collected 1992-94**

	Age													
	21-25		26-30		31-35		36-40		41-45		46-50		51-55	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Children start/Set. school	0	5	0	5	0	8	0	9	0	0	0	1	0	0
Children left school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	1	0	0
Children left home	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	0
Living/ someone	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Moving house	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Broken/ Rel.	0	3	0	4	2	3	3	3	2	4	0	1	0	0
Redund/ ancy	2	4	6	1	1	4	3	1	5	0	0	1	0	0
Illness	0	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Death of Rel.	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	3	15	7	12	3	15	7	17	8	7	0	7	0	0
Comb.Total	18		19		18		24		15		7		0	

Total male student responses 28

Total female student responses 73

Total all student responses 101



**Table 38** **Cumulative totals for anticipated and non-anticipated (crisis) life changes. Data collected 1992-94**

**Anticipated Life Changes**

Total male student responses                      0

Total female student responses                      39

-----  
Total all student responses:                      39  
-----

**Non-anticipated Life Changes**

Total male student responses:                      28

Total female student responses:                      34

-----  
Total all student responses:                      62  
-----

**Anticipated and Non-anticipated Life Changes**

Total male student responses:                      28

Total female student responses:                      73

-----  
Total all students responses:                      101  
-----

The figure of one hundred and one total responses for either anticipated or non-anticipated life changes represents over eighty five per cent of the one hundred and seventeen application forms considered in the research. However before further analysis of the quantitative data from the students' 'Personal Profiles' there are some minor qualifications needed to these final figures, for although they represent the overall student response for change or crisis categories, it needs to

be stated that in some instances students mentioned more than one anticipated/non-anticipated change in their lives as a reason for undertaking Access. This means that to illuminate singular student responses for only one category in either change or crisis factors, we need to subtract the additional responses where students have identified more than one factor in either. An analysis of the statistics in Table 39 identified only ten students who fell into this category.

**Table 39   Students with more than one response in change or crisis categories. Data collected 1992-94**

Student No. and gender.	Change Cat.	Crisis Cat.	Reduction	
			Change	Crisis
6M	0	3	0	-2
9F	2	0	-1	0
11M	0	3	0	-2
17F	1	2	0	-1
22F	1	2	0	-1
23M	0	2	0	-1
39M	0	2	0	-1
81M	0	2	0	-1
Total Reduction Required			-1	-9

Thus taking our final figure of one hundred and one student responses in either change or crisis categories, then then deducting the ten overlaps identified in Table 39 the figure

representing a singular student response is ninety one, representing nearly seventy eight per cent of the student population. The breakdown between change or crisis categories leaves thirty eight in the anticipated change category (after deduction of one since Student 9 registered two changes) and fifty three non-anticipated change group (after deduction of nine taking into account the seven students who registered more than one crisis).

There is one further consideration to take into account, that fourteen students experienced both change and crisis situations and to avoid duplication there are several permutations at our disposal: that we count the fourteen as 'anticipated changes' or as 'non-anticipated changes' (crises), or seven of each but whatever the decision, in terms of final numbers we would only have to deduct a maximum of seven responses in relation to our choice from the final figures. This would mean that in subtracting seven from our figure of ninety one total change/crisis responses we still have eighty four singular student responses, representing just nearly seventy two per cent of the total student number. (There will be further consideration of change and crisis overlap in the Conclusion.)

After dual response and overlap considerations are taken into account it needs to be emphasised that the very small number of students who mentioned more than one change, (one student), or more than one crisis, (eight students), or combinations of both

(fourteen students) underpins the quantitative findings of the research, that nearly three quarters of the student population experienced change or crisis situations and mentioned them as a reason for enrolling on Access. Furthermore the breakdown between anticipated and non-anticipated life changes relates very specifically to gender since all anticipated life change responses are from women.

### **Apathy, Alienation and Activation**

One hundred and one total responses for either 'anticipated' or 'non-anticipated life changes represents 86.32% of the one hundred and seventeen application forms considered in the research. (Ninety one responses (77.78%) allowing students one response to each category and eighty four responses (71.79%) allowing students one response to either category). These seem to be a very significant figures, sustaining the hypothesis that personal change to quite a large degree acts as both catalyst and catharsis for mature students enrolling on Access.

The title of the thesis, 'Journeys: A study of the interplay between structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors affecting mature students' decisions to undertake an Open Access Course for possible entry to university', has been witnessed up to this point of the research by the 'apathy' towards education in Chapter Three, 'Education Profiles', by the 'alienation' towards work in Chapter Four, 'Work Profiles', and by the 'activation' of change or crisis in Chapter Five,

'Personal Profiles', reasons for doing Access. Thus, although having a very negative perception of education, as demonstrated in the 'Education Profiles' by the students' experience of school life, such that they wanted to leave at the earliest opportunity, they now seek to return to the highest echelons of the education system, university. As has been said before in the thesis, such a move represents a cultural somersault, in terms of where they have come from and where they now intend going. Culturally speaking they should not, would not, be doing what they are doing, if we were to take culturally conditioned birth position as the first and final determinant of the life picture, on the assumptions that biography is assured, culture is assured, structure is assured. But of course things are not so assured, at least not for everyone all of the time, as structural, cultural and personal change testify. We are not totally controlled by our structural/cultural position and do have some choice, limited albeit, on how we act and what decisions we take.

The acknowledged failure of the compensatory education movement for working class children in the nineteen sixties needs to be understood in relation to the success of the compensatory education movement called Open Access for working class adults in the nineteen eighties/nineties. The reason why the former failed may relate to why the latter succeeded. Had any educationalist attempted to intervene with 'cultural goodies', in the lives of the Access students, when they were working

class children, intent on leaving school at the earliest available opportunity, they would probably have been met with the cultural apathy contained in the 'Education Profiles'.

Much later on however, after years outside of the education system, in work, in marriage, and through personal change and crisis, that cultural resistance has changed to cultural compatibility. Compensatory education for working class children applied the pull factor and failed; it may be that Access courses act as a pull factor for some working class adults finding a compatibility with the push factor, the desire for change, due to change, due to crisis.

The 'push-pull' factor, is the key, expanding on the Weberian 'elective affinity' between the right people and the right idea, both in relation to the right time. The specifics of biographical cultural factors seems to be the deciding factor as to whether they apply for Access or not, the change or/and crisis they experienced prior to making their decision to undertake Access as a preparation for university entry being crucial to this choice. The 'activation' of change or crisis is activation occurring within the structural, cultural and familial life factors of the students, relating to their past experience of their cultural position, their present sense of the same, and their attitudes towards it, which in turn is perceived through the 'new eyes' of change, of 'ends', of

possible 'new beginnings'. Chapter Six, takes up the morphogenetic storyline.

## CHAPTER SIX

### NEW BEGINNINGS: WORKING WITH PEOPLE

#### Introduction

Chapter Six looks at the notion of 'new beginnings', completing the morphogenetic story. On their application forms, many students talk about, a 'new direction', a 'new beginning', a 'new chapter', a 'new adventure', a 'crossroads'. The 'journey' is nearing completion and thoughts of a 'new journey' already underway. As previous biographical and cultural journeys near to an end, ideas of the future are forming, and what might come next, based on what has gone before, educational failure, work alienation, change and crisis in their personal lives. The Chapter is not a long one, since as Archer says, regarding the end of one cycle, begetting another, '... the concepts and theories we employ to deal with this next cycle may well have to change in order to explain this change our subject matter has undergone.' [Archer, 1995: 91.] Thus what comes after Access is a new story in the students' lives and not the brief of the research, which concerns what came before Access and influenced the original application to undertake the course.

However, since many of the students themselves were mentioning the future, detailing future aspirations and new beginnings on their application forms in the 'Personal Profiles' section, 'reasons for doing Access', it seems reasonable to let them



have their say on the matter, suggesting that the story is not all cultural doom and gloom. Furthermore, in sociological terms, although new beginnings represents a new area of research, with new methodological issues to consider, a short consideration of future aspirations, consolidates the core of the research, by illuminating the morphogenetic cycle, which really hangs on how 'endings' become 'new beginnings'.

The Chapter is in two sections, firstly, Section One, 'New Beginnings', identifies students statements on their applications forms where they have talked about 'new chapters', 'new adventures', 'crossroads' etc, picking up on the terminology of a perceived new future based on the desire to undertake Access and the legacy of their cultural journey.

Section Two, 'Desire to Work with People' considers what those future aspirations may entail in practical terms, and with thirty nine students mentioning 'working with people' on their 'reasons for doing Access', clearly the issue is a significant one. The desire to 'work with people' needs to be contrasted with the information in the 'Work Profiles' Chapter, when forty four students mentioned that the only satisfaction they obtained at work was in relation to working alongside other people, that is workmates also 'culturally trapped' in the monotony of the workplace.

In both sections there is something of an overlap in terms of not only 'new beginnings' and 'working with people' as the core of that 'new beginning' but also quite often talk of 'the right time for me' which really brings 'elective affinity' into the picture. In terms of morphogenesis, 'beginnings', 'middles' 'ends' and 'new beginnings', we could then speculate that 'elective affinity' may have a compatibility with the beginning and end of each stage of the phased process, the linkage between beginnings/middles, between middles/ends, and particularly the linkage between ends/new beginnings, the crucial time where one complete cyclical process leads on to another. Thus, in relationship to morphogenesis, the temporal significance of 'elective affinity' may be its relationship to moments of cyclical crossover, within the movement of a specific cycle, and by the same criterion even more significant and obvious, within the movement from one cycle to another. Clearly this would need to be researched in more depth, but were the speculation to be sustained, then because of its contribution to transition, 'elective affinity' could prove to be a very substantial methodological tool for those working from a morphogenetic perspective on events.

In relation to the research, the story of the Access students and their personal morphogenesis, the evidence would seem to sustain the argument, because of the majority of them experiencing something of a push/pull factor, for an expansion of Weber's 'affinity' concept and how that moment of affinity

relates very clearly to the end and new beginning of a morphogenetic episode. By the same criterion, the final three chapters of the thesis, excluding the Conclusion, Chapter Five, 'Personal Profiles' looking at 'endings' via personal change and/or crisis, Chapter Seven, the present chapter, looking at 'New Beginnings' and Chapter Eight, looking at 'Affinities', actually forge in a morphogenetic sense, the concepts we have been discussing above, the relationship we have been discussing above, cyclical change-over and elective affinity. In relation to this, in both research sections of Chapter Seven, I have highlighted in bold, all instances of, 'new beginnings', 'working with people' and 'the right time' to illuminate not only the specifics of each section but their possible temporal relationship to each other.

#### SECTION ONE: NEW BEGINNINGS

Table 40 New Directions: (H1)  
Data collected 1992-94

Age								
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male	2	4	1	2	4	0	0	0
Female	4	1	5	2	1	1	0	0
Total	6	5	6	4	5	1	0	0
Total male students	13							
Total female students	14							
Total all students	27							

The responses:-

**Student No. 11. 45 year old male.**

I therefore either continue with what life has so far provided or **make a fresh start and totally change direction ...** I feel that access is the **opportunity to start again and put the past behind me and change failure to something of value.**

**Student No. 14. 27 year old male.**

I realise my academic skills will be rusty but I know I can succeed because I **have a real desire for a decent future ...** My application is late but **this is the right moment for me.**

**Student No. 15. 21 year old male.**

I have been unemployed for nearly a year now, during which time I have had plenty of time to take stock of my life and realise that I want a complete career change. With jobs being more scarce, I need to gain more knowledge and education to better myself employment wise and personally too. I have no job to give up and **a clear horizon in front of me in which to start new again.**

**Student No. 22. 40 year old female.**

I am now divorced and have two children to support and I want a new start and a chance to reach my true potential. In a few years my children will be doing their own thing and I feel I have to find a new life style for myself before this happens ... I've been through quite a lot in the last few years ... I **hope this will be a new beginning for me.**

**Student No. 31. 27 year old male.**

**I need to reach my cause, my destiny.**

**Student No. 36. 37 year old male.**

Access I hope will be **a starting point along a road to a better future.**

**Student No. 41. 20 year old female.**

I have made mistakes in my life and having felt dissatisfied have learnt to put them into perspective and take as many positive things from them as possible. I know **my route** to accomplishing this achievement and pride starts by going on a full-time course along-side other people with similar ambitions, with support from staff as well as fellow students, where **"a new life begins"**, to sum it up in a word **'ACCESS'!** (The use of capitals and speech marks are the students.)

**Student No. 44. 32 year old male.**

When I read the book (The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist) it was **like a veil had been removed** from my eyes and the more I looked the more I saw a sick system stitching people up.

**Student No 51. 26 year old female.**

I now have time on my hands as I am alone. The Access Course does not really fit into what I have already achieved. I **simply want a change of direction.**

**Student No. 53. 24 year old male.**

The reasons for my desire to study the Access course are the challenges on offer, the knowledge gained and the determination **to change my life-course** in accordance with my interests.

**Student No. 55. 33 year old female.**

I thought this course would open my eyes to life around me and give me a clearer perspective. Since everything I've done is **aimed at making a new life** for myself and my two children.

**Student No. 56. 38 year old male.**

Being unemployed, **this is a time for personal advancement**, this course is **a beginning** of that.

**Student No. 58. 22 year old female.**

At present I'm 22 years old, and feel **I'm ready for a change of**

direction.

Student No. 63. 46 year old female.

Because of my new situation, I now feel that I am gaining control of my life and am in a position to make decisions about the future.

Student No. 72. 45 year old male.

This was time to take stock of my life and look for a change of direction.

Student No. 73. 34 year old female.

I never knew what job I wanted to do but now with a fresh start ...

Student No. 74. 25 year old female.

I feel the Access course would fit in well with my life at present and in the future ... I would like to use the experience I have gained over the years, in employment I may gain in the future.

Student No. 77. 30 year old male.

I know I have only scratched the surface but I have felt for such a long time that I've been like an aeroplane taxiing along a runway wanting to take off, and now there is no turning back.

Student No. 82. 26 year old male.

I have been thinking a lot about my life recently. I realised that I wanted to take the first concrete step onto my path, my goal, my destiny. I do not know where this is yet but this course, as soon as I read the literature with this form, almost shouted out to me that it is the 'right' first step. I have experienced many shifts in my life, many things have fallen away. I feel a fundamental need to open up new frontiers, new horizons for myself. This course, I believe would do that. My life up to the last three months, has been a catalogue of

drifting and searching. Going away broke that cycle ... All in all, this Access course, I feel is perfect for this time in my life.

**Student No. 84. 36 year old female.**

I really hope I will be given my opportunity to step into a new direction.

**Student No. 87. 45 year old male.**

As I am 45 and have no qualifications, I have little chance of getting a job in the present recession. My aim is to turn this to my advantage by improving my education and hopefully improve my chances of getting a job in the future.

**Student No. 90. 28 year old black female.**

We all have to take all that's going. No matter how tough we all think we are, we will not know what we can or cannot do unless we take a chance on ourselves. I'd like my children in years to come to say 'if my mother took a chance and it paid off them I'll do the same.' (The use of speech marks is the students.)

**Student No. 93. 41 year old female.**

I also feel that now is probably the best time in my life to start a new chapter and put myself first.

**Student No. 95. 34 year old female.**

I am unemployed presently and have been for eight years so I feel the time is right to do something like the Open Access Course.

**Student No. 96. 32 year old female.**

I will learn some new skills, have a new direction.

Student No. 99. 41 year old male.

So now I have made a decision. I want a total change of direction and a degree in Modern History will help me to get out of the rut that I have become stuck in.

Student No. 102. 33 year old female.

Since March I have been unemployed and have had lots of time to think about my future ... I feel very strongly that it is the right time to embark on a course to prepare for my future.

The message which comes through is a very strong one about 'new directions', 'new beginnings', 'new chapters', 'the right time', 'the future': Access means a lot for the Access students. The promise it holds, is helping to close one chapter and open up another. The 'alternative route' it offers, is a new cultural path, formal further education, alien cultural territory for working class people, not forgetting their negative school experiences, their alienating years in employment and their lack of formal education qualifications. They have had an education of sorts, of course, lessons that offer no A levels, no degrees, no 'first class degrees'.

The cultural path they have trodden seems to offer very hard lessons indeed, but never lessons too late for the learning. Through the turmoil of structural, cultural, familial problems, they chose to re-enter the fray, they sought to turn informal life experiential learning to formal educational qualifications, coming from the lowest, aiming for the highest, turning disadvantage to advantage, changing negatives into



positives, often using their own biographical-cultural problems as a personal/cultural catharsis for helping others in the process of helping themselves. And in one sense change not only begets change, but meets up with change. Section Two considers the desire to 'work with people' in the future, a desire expressed by many of the Access students on their application forms.

## SECTION TWO: WORKING WITH PEOPLE

Table 41 Wanting to work with people in the future (H2)  
Data collected 1992-94

Age								
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60
Male	6	5	2	2	2	1	0	0
Female	6	3	7	3	1	1	0	0
Total	12	8	9	5	3	2	0	0
Total male students	18							
Total female students	21							
Total all students	39							

The responses of those who want to work with people are printed below in their entirety, befitting the crucial part this issue plays in the research and its centrality in the lives of the people who come to Access, fed up with the monotony of serving drinks, of fitting nuts and bolts, of ringing tills, of filing

paper, of scaring crows.

**Student No. 7. 21 year old male.**

I have a desire to **work with people** but without qualifications the type of job I am interested in would be unobtainable. I ask that you give me a go.

**Student No. 10. 37 year old female.**

I dread the thought of working in a cake shop until I retire when I know I can do more. I've always wanted to do work with people - **I've wanted to be a social worker or counsellor** since **I started my home help**. It's been put off before, only I don't want to do it again.

**Student No. 11. 45 year old male.**

I still have no qualifications that would assist an employer to see my worth and I have been unsuccessful so far in **my search for jobs in social work**. I still have potential, I can still make a valuable contribution to society, I can still make a success of life and I feel that access is the opportunity to start again and put the past behind me and change failure to something of value.

**Student No. 12. 25 year old black woman.**

At the moment I'm sure I **want to be a social worker**.

**Student No. 25. 32 year old female.**

I chose this particular course as I have always been interested in society and why **people** live differently, behaviour patterns, and I think that I can offer good life experience.

**Student No. 27. 27 year old male.**

As to finding myself in a position to undertake this course well to be honest I'll have to take a step down from full-time employment to part-time work but even if you refuse me this

time around then next year I'll be there again. I'm determined to achieve what I want to **help those people** who really need people to identify with in order to start to sort their lives out.

**Student No. 31. 31 year old female.**

I would like to be a carer where I am working with people, and use my experience that I have had as a nurse to deal with difficult situations I may face.

**Student No. 33. 21 year old male.**

**As long as I can remember I have always wanted to work with people** and I believe this course is the **right road** for myself as it would allow me to study either **youth work or social work** at the end of it.

**Student No. 35 22 year old female.**

I more than **enjoy working with lots of different people ...** I am interested in the well being of everybody I meet. **I like to help those who need me,** I am also very reliable. I find I can talk at ease to anybody as I have a good personality and a very caring attitude towards everybody I meet.

**Student No. 39. 31 year old male.**

In the future I hope to become an **Educational Psychologist** working in schools. I **enjoy being with people** and working as part of a team.

**Student No. 45. 27 year old male.**

**... all in all I love working with people** and this would give me the start I want.

**Student No. 46. 28 year old male.**

And with this **feeling of wanting to work with people of needs,** and having the ability and understand that this course will

give to me, Access is what I need to do for the way forward for myself at this time in my life.

**Student No. 53. 24 year old male.**

I am interested in people and society, would like to work with people and ultimately aim to work in the social/psychological fields.

**Student No. 56. 38 year old male.**

I want to help people in some way to realise their potential in whatever sphere I may find myself in my chosen career. I want to be enabled to put into effect my abilities to be a helper and an active participant to people wishing to better themselves or climb out of a pit they might believe they cannot do by themselves. I want to be a helping hand, a reaching hand, reaching out to aid those who might be desperate for help or just in need of gentle guidance. There is no link to my previous work, except that of dealing with people as I met them, in their homes, as a listener and hopefully, in some situations, an advisor.

**Student No. 58. 22 year old female.**

I am interested to find out more about the ways of different people and what they portray to others, also how a 'self-image' can be quite difference

**Student No. 61. 28 year old male.**

I feel I can enrich my own life and that of others by working with special needs, or the underprivileged in our society. My attitude towards car repairs has changed dramatically in the last year and I feel enthusiastic towards it. I need to fulfil my life by working with people and not with machines.

**Student No. 64. 49 year old female.**

I am interested in people and their needs. With my life ... I think have something to offer.

**Student No. 65. 24 year old female.**

I believe that in order to broaden my educational qualifications and future prospects I need to commit myself wholly to a project which would offer me **the opportunity to change my career and work with people.**

**Student No. 68. 26 year old male.**

I feel that, I really would like to work with 'people' not with machines and welding guns. I once considered perhaps volunteering for charity work through the church but was again afraid of what it would entail. I'm sorry if **what I'm saying here just sounds like me saying what you want to hear but I'm not.** I really feel that given the opportunity I could really benefit from doing access. I'm sorry if my grammar, spelling and handwriting leave something to be desired but it has been sometime since I have done anything like this.

**Student No. 70. 29 year old female.**

I enjoy conversing with all kinds of people on a wide range of subjects and this course could put me on the right path towards my ultimate career goal which is **to be a primary school teacher.**

**Student No. 71. 31 year old female.**

This access course is ideal for me to undertake because when I have completed the course I would like to further my studies and do the C.Q.S.W.

**Student No. 72. 45 year old male.**

I enjoy the company of people and I feel I can communicate with them. I **have often thought of working in a more people orientated environment.**

**Student No. 73. 34 year old female.**

I never knew what job I wanted to do but now with a fresh start my **gut reaction is towards people.** This access course promises to help me find all of these answers.

**Student No. 74. 25 year old female.**

Being a carer has given me tremendous insight to the needs of people with disabilities. I would like to use the experience I have gained over the years in employment I may gain in the future.

**Student No. 77. 31 year old male.**

Throughout my life I have been very fortunate to have met many people from all walks of life, happy-sad, rich-poor, good-bad, serious and silly. Quite a few weeks ago I began to take a keen interest in my fellow man. The more I talked to people and listened the more I began to realise that people were not as individualistic as they first seemed. I began to notice that people who had the same character usually reacted in a similar way emotionally, that people's character traits enabled them to react in certain ways to an external experience association with their pre-dispositions. I know I have only scratched the surface but I have felt for such a long time that I've been like an aeroplane taxiing along a runway waiting to take off and now I have there is no turning back.

**Student No. 82. 37 year old male.**

My life up to the last three months, has been a catalogue of drifting and searching. Going away broke that cycle and I now wish to take my opportunity and begin achieving things for myself in the hope that one day I will be able to fully fulfil my desire to help people in my own way, whatever that may be. I wish to re-light the fire ... . All in all, this access course, I feel, is perfect for this time in my life.

**Student No. 84. 36 year old female.**

Access to Social studies is for me a very interesting proposition: yes, I am interested in people (I have been told I'm a good listener) but also in what makes them 'tick', and broadly how society works (or doesn't work), what theories and thoughts lie behind it all. (The use of brackets and speech marks is the students.)

**Student No. 85. 27 year old female.**

I would like to work with mentally ill, ideally as an out reach worker, worker in the community. I have heard very good reports

of this course . I am interested in doing this course as another stepping stone in my educational career.

**Student No. 87. 46 year old male.**

Although I'm not sure what type of work I'd like to do, my aim is a job that helps others.

**Student No. 88. 24 year old female.**

I would like to join the Course as I am aiming to gain employment as a youth worker/adviser and also better my chances in employment.

**Student No. 90. 28 year old female.**

I would like to be able to teach people, children, teenagers, things I have been able to learn, through Access, if I were given a chance.

**Student No. 98. 44 year old female.**

The biggest reason for doing the course is I worked voluntary for quite sometime and found that many statutory bodies will only take you seriously if you are professionally qualified. I was very good at counselling and would like to go back to it as a professional.

**Student No. 100. 24 year old female.**

I have had a variety of jobs, but they all have one thing in common - people, ranging from the elderly as a care assistant, people from all aspects of life as a croupier. Businessmen and women, and corporate managers whilst working as a sales rep and finally families, people young and old, as a waitress. I enjoy working and meeting people and I feel I have a lot to offer them. It is to myself to try and gain a higher intellectual level and try and use this to help other people.

**Student No. 101. 31 year old Asian female.**

I want to do access because I am quite sure that this course will help me to improve my English and in order to realise my

ideal which is to be a good English teacher it would be necessary to attend access.

**Student No. 102. 33 year old female.**

As I left school without taking A levels and after a time wondering what subjects to study to **get into Social Work** I felt the access course on offer was tailor-made for my needs.

**Student No. 103. 23 year old male.**

The reason I would like to **pursue a career in social work**, not only do I think I would be useful in this line of work but my social back ground and upbringing I feel I would be able to communicate with most of a community without them feeling that I was any better than them. I seem to get on with the youth of the area I live they ask for my advise on their problems eg. crime, sex, home life etc, so I would like to take this further and **earn a living out of something I enjoy.**

**Student No. 115. 32 year old female.**

I have always been interested in people and have worked with 'the public' abroad for nearly 4 years. I feel I have much to offer to help people as I am good at seeing solutions to problems and I am optimistic. I am also good at relating to and **understanding people.**

**Student No. 116. 40 year old female.**

I have always been interested in people - in what 'makes them tick' ... I would like to be a **social worker - to be able to help people** find solutions to their problems. (The use of speech marks is the students.)

**Student No. 117. 21 year old male.**

My previous experience has shown to me my 'talent' for working with children and **people in general.**



The very high response obtained from thirty nine students was the second highest response of any category in the thesis. The highest response was in the Chapter on 'Work Profiles', the category, 'Working with People' F1, with forty four students saying that they derived satisfaction from working with people, amidst the alienation of otherwise monotonous jobs. Thus, the correlation seems clear, people involvement, not from just meeting them within the workplace, in factory, office or shop, but by them becoming the core of the job, no longer working with 'things' alongside other people, but actually working with 'people'. The difference between 'working with things' and 'working with people' is really the difference between the alienating working world of working class people and the absorbing working world of middle class people. It is the difference, between shop assistant, car park attendant, barwork, production track worker, office filing clerk, receptionist, 'the world of things' and lecturer, social worker, probation officer, teacher, doctor, surgeon, lawyer, constituting 'the world of people'. The move from 'things' to 'people' requires additional educational qualifications, to those held by the Access students, essentially a university degree at the very least.

The desire of the Access students to work with people may be further heightened by the experience of their own lives, by the structural, cultural and familial, 'crises' they have experienced, the marital breakdowns, the redundancies, ill

health, unemployment etc; the 'crises' acting as something of a catalyst for change, of 'going through it', 'of wanting to become involved with it', a catharsis, a healing agent something good from something bad, pain is learning, learning is pain.

Such learning of course is not accredited with formal educational certification, and recognised qualifications are thus needed as the formal icing on the cultural cake. In the film adaptation of Frank Baum's classic tale, 'The Wizard of Oz', the Scarecrow went in search of brains. He was told by the Wizard, that many people in society have no brains, but what they do have is a written diploma, stating that they have brains. The Wizard gave Scarecrow a 'Diploma in Thinkology' and lo and behold he immediately starting reciting Pythagoras's theorem. Relieved then of years of alienation of 'stationery position' in the corn fields, Scarecrow experienced instant social mobility, 'diploma style'. [Fleming, MGM, 1966.] Any similarity with the present university system, middle class dominated, is of course, purely coincidental.

Cultural deviation does not come easily, not half as easily as cultural deprivation. The latter, people are often born into without choice, the former, they have to decide on, with some choice, based often on cultural circumstances beyond their control. People do not make instant, structurally, culturally, unbridled decisions to walk on unfamiliar ground. The course

that sets people on the Access journey is often the result of being blown off course, culturally floundering. People do then make choices, often going against most that went before, since most that went before appears to have let them down, has all but disintegrated. The 'Personal Profiles' of the students have demonstrated, that something important was happening in their lives. There has been some new interplay between structure and agency, overriding to a large degree the original conditioning of the cultural socialisation process, the socio-interaction of personal change and/or crisis culminating in elaboration of what was before, and generating a 'new beginning'. Personal change is the catalyst, personal change not always intended but representative of the kaleidoscopic cultural shifts under which we all live, subject to both moments of stability and movement.

Chapter Seven, considers further the issue of personal, familial, cultural and structural morphogenesis, in relation to Weber's concept of 'elective affinity', and in relation to chronological and aeonic concepts of time. Time and change are clearly the linkage between all three areas of study and the cornerstone of the thesis, hence the title, 'Journeys'. The methodology for Chapter Seven still incorporates as its foundation stone the original student application forms, but adds to the information derived from these by the use of further written statements, discussions, and informal research

interviews conducted with the students after their original  
Access application.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### AFFINITIES: THE PUSH AND PULL OF IDEAS

**Introduction: ticking over nicely, ticking over culturally.**

The possibility and demarcation between anticipated and non-anticipated life changes is by no means clear cut. It is at one level, in that one does not wish for, or plan for, divorce, redundancy, etc. At another level people plan for the worse, indeed they are structurally encouraged to cover themselves against life crises, unemployment, ill-health, death etc., with insurance schemes, protection plans and formalised cover in the terms of Beveridge's 'from the cradle to the grave'. But at another level of meaning, our perceptual moment on the journey, we do not accept the fragility of it all, do not see death, unemployment, ill-health as hard reality; as long as things tick over, we tick over with them. The things that tick over are cultural things, education, work, leisure, marriage, children, life itself. But things do not always tick over nicely, tick over culturally, because of unforeseen circumstances and unintended consequences of the complexity of living forged between structure, culture and biography. Personal crisis can leave our biographical/cultural meaning in tatters, amidst the immensity of the structural environment, which at times of personal crisis, can appear hostile and alien; a state of personal, cultural and structural anomie by any Durkheimian standards.

### Change and interpretation of change

Of course other changes in life are meaningfully considered as potential and planned for possibilities, such as marriage, children, change of employment, children going to school, children leaving school, retirement. Just as we are encouraged to think of cover 'from the cradle to the grave' in financial terms, unlike the unforeseen crises on the journey, we attach a constant morphogenetic meaning of possible personal change in our lives. If the personal and cultural road runs smoothly, in relation to wider structural stability, we adapt to life changes as part of our chartered cultural route, and thus change does not appear as crisis-like or anomic.

In this morphogenetic meaning of how we attempt to navigate the course of our life, Clerihew was perhaps a little hasty in his famous couplet, That 'The art of biography is different from cartography, biography is about chaps and cartography is about maps', for we do all try to map the course of where we are going, the personal, cultural and structural map; the art of biography may indeed be about maps. Nevertheless, even within that meaningful understanding of the road we travel, we have other conscious levels of meaning, of other possible journeys in our minds, than the one we navigate and travel. Just as Markovic sees 'other futures', so in our own minds we can see other roads than the one we travel. Points of 'elective affinity' can be seen as the moment when such alternative

routes, can be realised at the crossroads, such as a worker volunteering for redundancy after years of dreaming of change.

Weber's notion of 'elective affinity' needs to be understood, not just as the moment, but as a coming together of past, present and possible future, the true sociology of destiny. The right idea, the right person and the right time can come only in relation to what has gone before, which may not have been the right idea, the right person, the right time. The moment means something for the person, and can really only be understood in relation to other moments, perhaps just as meaningful at the time, but overtaken by the temporal fusion of life changes and life meaning. Thus in this sense, a morphogenetic sense of elective affinity, moments beget moments, change promotes change. We know that the individual is not a totally free agent in the road s/he travels, and can be blown off course, or even on course, by wider cultural and/or structural changes, but the key issue is the interpretation of those changes by the individual.

The Access students faced many changes and crises in their lives, and the interpretation of those moments led them to take a certain action, a radical deviation from familiar cultural roads, towards unfamiliar cultural territory, i.e. entry to university. At the point of Access applications, a lot had clearly been happening in their lives, and this is the crux of the thesis. In the 'Work Profiles' and the 'Personal Profiles'

a separation was introduced between anticipated and non-anticipated life changes, and hopefully that demarcation has been largely sustained by the biographical evidence presented in the relevant Chapters. The purpose of this Chapter is firstly, to follow-up on those definitions of change and crisis, of anticipated and non-anticipated life changes, and their effects on the students decisions to undertake Access, and secondly to dig deeper into that demarcation to uncover possible common changing ground, a fusion of crisis and change in relation to the roads we travel and the roads we would like to travel.

Thus, although crisis occurred for many, the crisis may have meant that 'ideas of change', alternative routes, different futures of what could be, may now be realised due to breakdown of what is, redundancy, marital breakdown, crisis situations, and anticipated life changes, children settled at school, etc. Thus, the impetus for cultural dream fulfilment may indeed be cultural nightmares, when cultural norms are left in personal tatters, or when anticipated change provides fresh impetus and opportunity for realisation of personal aspirations.

The information for this Chapter has been gathered over the past two years from information derived from several sources: from follow-up interviews for applicants to Access, from informal conversations with the students during their time on Access; by asking them to write about their reasons for doing



Access; and finally by a series of short informal, in-depth interviews, specifically designed for the thesis, with selected male/female students representing either the change or crisis categories, or a combination of both. Thus, the main question was to find out in as simple terms as possible, 'why Access?' So the question was honestly put, with some follow-up questions where necessary to obtain elaboration on first answers, with the minimum of intrusion on the person's personal details.

Much of this questioning was to ascertain not only the immediacy of 'why Access' as say with a crisis situation but also to dig a little deeper behind the meaning for change, had the person felt they needed more in their lives and were there personal aspirations within their minds, held at bay due to circumstances, most probably personal stability or continuity within marriage or within work. Thus, in a crisis situation, when the crisis occurred, it did not just affect the present but due to the painful and destructive effects of the new situation, it made possible potential fulfilment of past non-realised aspirations, dreams. Or similarly, with an anticipated life change, children settled at school for instance, then present changes can lead to realisation of past non-realised aspirations, dreams. The point needs to be made again that just as with the complexity of defining situation as crisis or change, so it is with the complexity of defining a temporal fusion between past and present consciousness.

Having established reasons for Access, the next line of enquiry was to find out if there were any reasons for or deterrents to not being able to do Access, namely the strength of opportunity costs to consider. In a methodological nutshell the Chapter deals with **pressures for change and pressures for not changing.**

### **Delayed personal change; delayed personal crisis**

This Chapter deals with change, crisis or a combination of both. The last category is important since from discussions with students during their Access year it became increasingly clear that the demarcation was not always as clear cut as it seemed. We dealt with some of these issues in Chapter Three, 'Work Profiles' with those students who were made compulsorily redundant and those who volunteered for redundancy at the 'right time and right idea' for them. Thus those who were made redundant had no choice in the matter, whereas those who volunteered exercised choice and may not have left their employment without redundancy payment. This means that although probably enduring job dissatisfaction and not realising personal aspirations, they stuck it out due perhaps to financial and family commitments, the opportunity costs to them were too high without the redundancy carrot.

Clearly there are gender issues at stake here, the male breadwinner role in the working class family unit and the personal cultural trap he finds himself in due to the socialisation process and the demarcation of gender roles.

Margaret Benston [1971] has highlighted how working class men cannot easily enter into lengthy industrial disputes with their employers, since during a prolonged strike situation, the family unit would suffer greatly due to the loss of the man's wages, and thus there is a considerable cost to pay for strike action. This argument can be extended, not only to industrial disputes, but also and more so to the working class man's entire life situation, hopes, dreams, aspirations, the desire for change culturally being constantly tempered by the need to provide for the family, the need for financial survival. Within this context, the offer of redundancy and redundancy payments provides the man with two solutions to his cultural trap, to leave work and to leave work with a lump cash payment. The story of **Student No. 44, 31 year old male** illustrates these arguments very clearly during a follow up interview with him, designed for the research.

Q: Why Access?

A: I volunteered for redundancy since I felt really bored at work and that I wasn't realising myself.

Q: Would you have applied to Access without redundancy?

A: No. The redundancy helped me and anyway I just had to do it, to change. Nothing was going to stop me from doing that course. I hated my work, every minute of it. I couldn't stand it, I was there for four years and hated every moment of it. I was going into the unknown. After volunteering for redundancy I remember going into the kitchen with my tool box and thinking what have I done and then thinking you've actually done it.

Q: Were there any other things you had to consider before taking redundancy and before applying to Access?

A: No, I just had to get out and the redundancy money gave me the way. My wife was working and this also helped.

The interview highlights the two main considerations during the moment of decision, a strong desire for change and the reduced opportunity costs at the time which facilitated the change. The main methodological point of the thesis has centred on personal biography and structurally conditioned life courses of cultural groups and how personal change can occur within this triadic hold. Something has to give on one side or the other. Either structural properties change, as with economic recession, redundancy and people finding themselves unemployed, the individual structurally kicked off the conveyor belt. Here the 'push factor' substantially reduces opportunity costs. Alternatively, feelings of personal discontent build up to such a degree that the individual takes the first available opportunity to get off the conveyor belt, e.g. voluntary redundancy, or the feelings becoming so unbearable that the person just goes for it anyway, it being change. R. D. Laing has written of such situations:-

I've developed the therapeutic idea that it's not necessarily a good idea if you're in prison, in a dungeon say and the door happens to be open, to adopt the policy, I'm not going to walk out of this state of affairs unless I discover how I got into it. Forgotten how I got in here but I'm not going to walk out until you... you know, I work out all the reasons that I got into it. Now it doesn't necessarily help you to get out of it, to find out how you got into it. It might be useful but it often isn't. So I will say then to someone who is absolutely low, when was the last time you remember ever being happy or is there anything that you can scan in the last 24 hours, the last 48 hours, go back as long as you like, when you last felt OK? [Laing, 1989: Channel 4.]

Of course, although we weigh up the odds as best we can under the prevailing structural, cultural and personal circumstances, according to Marx, 'making our own history but not necessarily under the circumstances of our own making', we still consider and take stock of our lives and our past decisions as the journey continues, with reflective personal and cultural hindsight. Thus Student 44 wrote a short piece on his reflections about why he started on Access after he had actually begun. I asked students over the past two years if they would write for me their thoughts about Access, why they started and what it meant for them.

**Student No. 44. 32 year old male.**

I was brought up in a deprived area of Coventry and went through the usual education system to arrive at the other end of it to go on to an apprenticeship and then a job. I didn't realise at the time what relevance this upbringing and later my job experience would have on my life now. I find that I can draw on my past experiences and use them in my academic life now. My life has been like a jigsaw with pieces missing. I now find through my learning at college, that the missing pieces are being fitted into place to make something of a picture.

Questions I have always asked myself are being answered to some degree. I now want to complete the whole picture, if that's possible, by learning more about the subjects that are being taught. This I hope to continue at University. I don't need any more motivation than the fact that after years of being in a stagnated state academically I am now alive. The course I have been on at college has allowed me to start to understand why I got into the former position of stagnation. This knowledge, I hope, I will one day be able to use to help people in the position I once found myself in ... at the moment I am married with three young children, this is another motivation for me to do well as I also have their interests at heart and one day hope in gaining a degree I will be able to provide them with a good living. But my overriding ambition is a thirst for knowledge to understand myself and the world I find myself in.

Although his story is told after commencement of Access, his reflections on why he started and what it means to him, do make sense, morphogenetically speaking. His present is doing the job, helping him to put some pieces of the jigsaw together, making some sense of the past, providing him with a new motivation. He mentions three 'motivations', one related to the past, one for the present and one for the future. The past, 'I don't need any more motivation than the fact that after years of living in a stagnated state academically I am now alive'; the future, 'I am married with three young children, this is another motivation for me to do well as I also have their interests at heart and one day hope in gaining a degree I will be able to provide them with a good living'; the present, But my overriding ambition is a thirst for knowledge, to understand myself and the world I find myself in'.

Thus, in Laingian terms, the door of the prison was open for him, via redundancy and he got out, without in classic Freudian, psychoanalytical terms, attempting to analyse why he got in there in the first place. In his analysis the answers come later after some time has passed, after leaving the 'prison state': 'questions I have always asked are being answered'. His future changes in content but not in focus, the interests of his three small children remain as was the case when in his culturally defined breadwinner role whilst he was in the factory, but are now re-focussed ultimately on his own mental satisfaction, his 'overriding ambition', 'a thirst

for knowledge to understand myself and the world I find myself in'.

His moment, his 'elective affinity', the juxtaposition of his biographical, familial, cultural and structural time and place came together to forge a new understanding of his life, with something old and something new, blending into a re-defined biographical, familial, cultural and structural meaning. Unlike, Student 44, Student 72, 45 year old male, was made compulsorily redundant and although the initial choice was taken for him, the story line is not so very dissimilar. Firstly, the core of the research interview:-

Q: Why Access?

A: I was chucked out. I wanted a change anyway and the only thing was to try and do some learning again.

Q: Before redundancy did you ever think of other things besides the job. Were there other things on your mind?

A: I had this in my mind for a long time, on and off. If I ever left I never wanted to go back into engineering again. I wanted something different. There's got to be something different in life to going and clocking in and going home again. If I got out of it I knew I didn't want to get back into it.

Q: Would you have left without redundancy?

A: I'd say no. I don't think I would have volunteered either. I think it was just the fact that I had got the push.

Q: Did you look for different kinds of work after redundancy?

A: I tried for jobs that were not in engineering but couldn't get them, social work and that sort of thing.

Q: Why couldn't you get them, because of qualifications do you think?

A: I think that was it. I went into engineering eventually, shift work, which left me the whole week free, left me time to do Access. I was talking to someone at Careers and they told me about Access, the intention was social work.

Q: What about opportunity cost in terms of money? Did you have to consider anything before enrolling on Access?

A: No I was still working on the shift work. I knew I could manage till Christmas and once I got to Christmas I knew I could get to Easter and once I got to Easter I knew I could get to the summer.

Q: Did you think about the future? You had a steady job for some years with reasonable money and suddenly found yourself without a steady job and a steady income. Did that worry you?

A: That played on my mind a lot. You perhaps had two hundred quid in your back pocket every week and you never had to worry about anything. But now if you have a hundred pound electric bill come in. It's things like that I never thought of before. You wonder whether you're doing the right thing. If it all sort of folds on you and you make a complete hash of it and you've burnt all your bridges behind.

Q: Did you ever seriously think of leaving Access because of that sort of thing? Thinking it too much in case you didn't succeed?

A: I just tended to take it as it came.

Once again from a Laingian perspective, the phrase 'I just tended to take it as it came', makes sense in the context of the 'prison door' being open, or in this case of being involuntarily thrown out of the industrial cell block. It happened, and far from remorse about it happening, **Student 72**, took immediate stock of the situation, of his personal freedom, his crisis, and rather than seeking return to industry sought radical change. When he says, 'There's got to be something different in life to going and clocking in and going home again. If I got out of it I knew I didn't want to get back into



it', his sentiments are not very different from Student 44, when he said, 'I don't need anymore motivation than the fact that after years of living in a stagnated state academically I am now alive'. The key issue is that both were unhappy in their working lives, but felt unable to do anything about it, to change it, because of circumstances prevailing, their jobs, their material survival, their cultural position. But when the moment came for each, they took advantage of it. The important issue here is the redundancy, the crisis, enabled potential fulfilment of personal aspirations, crisis made possible change.

Thus, the compulsory and voluntary factors behind these two students, does not differentiate between what came after, with both seeking radical change from what had gone before. Thus, although Student 44 was quicker off the cultural mark so-to-speak, by volunteering for redundancy, than Student 72 who was made redundant and would probably have not gone as he says 'without the push', once having found themselves, through different though related change mechanisms, outside the 'prison doors', they both were unanimous in not wanting to go 'back inside'.

The research interview with Student 23, 44 year old male, further illustrates the relationship between crisis and change.

Q: Why Access?

A: My marriage broke down and I volunteered for redundancy. I was able to take risks without consulting my partner.

Q: Would you still have volunteered for redundancy without the marriage break-up?

A: No, if my marriage hadn't broken down I would probably still be at work. The redundancy payment was like a big carrot helping me to get out.

Q: Did you want to leave work anyway?

A: Yes, the job was getting really boring. It was quite a good job really but I couldn't envisage myself leaving there for another factory. I needed a cash incentive to leave. I was lucky I had no family to support. There were seventy of us and only three volunteered for redundancy. Lots more would like to have left but couldn't with kids to support. Some were very envious and saw me escaping.

Q: Did you ever think about change before the marriage breakdown and before redundancy?

A: Yes I started O levels when I was at work. I attended night school in the mid eighties, five years before my marriage ended.

Q: What made you do the O levels?

A: I left school without any educational qualifications. I felt I had let myself down due to lack of qualifications but when I started the O levels I thought what is all the fuss about.

Q: So what made you do Access then?

A: Before I wasn't in a position to do anything about it because I was married and working.

The most important message of **Student 32** was the notion of being able to take risks now that he was on his own and therefore only had to think about himself. He could make decisions about returning to education to fulfil his desire to get educational qualifications, the lack of which had had a big impact on his life. He needed to prove to himself that he could do it. Within the context of 'elective affinity' there are several co-terminous causal factors at work here, each crucial

to the student's desire to enter university, all related to each other, in the sense of facilitating significant personal change. In terms of the combination of crisis and change, the marriage break-up, facilitated the voluntary redundancy, facilitated the application to do Access, facilitated the desire to prove himself educationally, facilitated his ultimate desire to go to university; a lot of bricks, a lot of brick building.

The significance of the last three students' stories is that the desire for change came before the crisis; the latter enabling the former to be realised, due to opportunity costs being largely neutralised, by redundancy payments, by marital breakdown, and by combinations of both for **Student 32**. The other significant factor is that they were all men, with the desire for personal change being held in cultural check by their work situation, they all had well paid factory jobs. **Student 72**, unmarried said that he would not have left the job voluntarily, whilst the position of **Students 32** and **44**, both married, one with children, felt their position was further restricted by the marital status, and the breadwinner role within their situation.

Clearly their stories are culturally and gender orientated, in terms of their social class as factory workers and their male roles, workers (all three), husbands (two of them) and fathers (one of them). Any prospect of fulfilling personal aspirations

of returning to education had to be realised within the context of their cultural and familial roles, and thus prospects for change were slim. Enter redundancy for one, and even with marriage and four small children he volunteered, hoping to enhance his educational qualifications and enter university; enter compulsory redundancy for another and he decides he will never go back to factory work but will strive for personal betterment and working with people rather than things, through returning to education; enter marital breakdown for the third, and he opts for voluntary redundancy, deciding to return to education in the hope of eventually obtaining a place at university.

The position of working class women facing change, crisis, or both also needs to be understood with the context of their socio-cultural situation. For instance **Student 69, a 40 year old female**, was in a position to undertake Access due to her son being settled in school but the interview reveals more-

Q: Why Access?

A: I have a son who was seventeen and he was settled in school. It was something I had considered before but now was the right time.

Q: Was there anything in your life which you would consider a crisis which may have affected your decision?

A: My marriage break up. I felt isolated but that was a while ago but there was nothing you can do about it at the time, your hands are full.

Q: What do you mean by your hands being full?

A: Having to bring up my son on my own and having no education qualifications.

Q: Why education then?

A: Due to my limited education at school I wanted to get some qualifications. There was no opportunity to do it before. I have always been interested in society and people. Access seemed to offer a lot, communication and writing skills.

Q: What do you mean about your interest in people?

A: Well I've always been interested in society and always had my own views. You talk to people but they're so conditioned.

Q: Did you have to consider any opportunity costs before applying to Access. Money or anything like that?

A: No I was alright, my benefits weren't affected by Access, and as I said my son was settled at school doing his A levels.

So on the socio-cultural face of it, Student 69 was in a position to do Access, due to her son being settled at school, but in some ways her position can be seen as related to her earlier marriage break up when she might have decided to return to education but could not do so due to the commitments of her single parent status. The gender parallel with the male students is obvious, they did not make the move due to work commitments, whereas she could not make the move due to her domestic commitments. In each case their gender roles put restrictions on their freedom, their choices, to do anything about their lives, about the possibility of personal change, such as returning to education. Their gender status whilst sharing some similarities also clearly highlight differences in their personal situation.

For instance, Student 23, the 44 year old male, (discussed earlier), saw his marriage breakdown, combined with redundancy payment as a way of fulfilling his dream to return to education, whereas, Student, 69, the 40 year old female interviewed above, was restricted in what she was able to do about her marriage breakdown by her single parent status, by having to take care of her child, and by not being in a redundancy situation with possible financial payment. She had to wait until some years later when her son was settled in school before she was able to make a significant change in her life. The former had wanted change but had to wait for personal crisis to occur, marital breakdown, before it could be realised and the latter had experienced personal crisis, marital breakdown, but had to wait for change to occur, her son settled at school, before she could think about her own personal aspirations.

The story of Student 74, a 24 year old female, illustrates further the gender issues involved in change and crisis, demonstrating how the domestic role need not only apply to the care of children. Her mother had for many years been severely disabled by arthritis.

Q: Why Access?

A: I had already started an introduction to social work course. I started this because my life wasn't going anywhere. I'd been caring for mum for a really long time and through a really good social worker we managed to get an allowance which we could buy in a carer. College was my escape route.

Q: You just thought what for me now then?

A: I had no qualifications. I have a few basic CSEs. The social worker we had out for my mum was brilliant and I just thought that if I could help people in that way. I felt that I had got a starting point due to looking after my mum.

Q: When you met your boyfriend did that help you. (The reason for this question is that Student 74 was the only student in the Personal Profiles to mention 'living with someone' as having an effect on her decision to join the Course.)

A: Yes he was very supportive.

Q: Why Access to social science and not social work?

A: Because it was quite a wide course, sociology, psychology and that sort of thing where the Access to Social Work was just that. I made the decision that I didn't want to do social work. I didn't know what I wanted to do. The Access course was going to give me time to do what I wanted to do and give the background that I needed.

Q: Were there any opportunity costs you had to consider? do you think that without the help for your mum you would have still done Access?

A: Without the help I couldn't have done it because I would have had to stay at home and look after mum. The social worker was good, he advised me what course I should do but I didn't do it because it was a social work course. When I first started doing it, I thought it was my turn now to have a bit of my life. I found it difficult to fit it all in. Because I coped with the introduction to welfare work course I knew I could cope with Access.

Clearly, the commitment to her mother is not so far removed from the commitment of women to children via cultural roles and the division of labour along gender lines. So just as some of the female students on Access had to wait until their children had started at school, were settled at school, had left school or in some cases left home, to relieve them of their caring roles, enabling them to return to education, **Student 74**, had to

wait until there was financial provision available to help her buy care for her mother until she was able to return to education. The other common denominator is the desire to return to education, since for many working class women, the years away from unemployment, looking after children or relatives, can leave them in a very poor market status in terms of what they can offer an employer. Much feminist research has indicated the marginal status of women within the employment market, primarily housewives and mothers, with secondary employment status, often taken advantage of by would be employers in terms of low wages and poor working conditions. [Oakley 1981, Delamont, 1980, Barron and Norris, 1978.] The main common denominator is the 'caring role', and not the place or the clientele, be it at work or in the home, be it children, invalid or elderly parents, or hospital patients, elderly residents in care, etc. etc.

Thus the main gender parallel for working class people which makes it possible to become Access students, is to be relieved of their work duties if they are men, and to be relieved of their caring duties if they are women. Redundancy is one form of being relieved at work, financial benefits to buy in care at home is another, but both situations as demonstrated in the student stories need another ingredient, the desire to change. Crisis situations, such as marital breakdown, such as compulsory redundancy, enable the person to



fulfil thoughts of change due to the breakdown of everyday life mores and the ensuing personal anomie. These factors seem to be getting to the core of the thesis, 'A study of the interplay between structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors affecting mature students' decisions to undertake an Open Access course for possible entry to university'. The factors are change, crisis, the desire to change and availability of circumstances in terms of providing reduced opportunity costs whereby the other factors can come to fruition.

**Student 84, 36 year old female demonstrates this once again**

**Q: Why Access?**

**A:** It was a change in my life, a progression. I thought of A level but my age put me off that. I felt I was inadequate in terms of English language, it was a cultural thing, coming from another country as I did. The Access package seemed relevant, study skills, communications and that sort of thing.

**Q: Any other reasons?**

**A:** Yes, for my self confidence. I always wanted to go to university. My parents also always wanted me to go. My children were reasonably settled at school.

**Q: Were there any opportunity costs to consider?**

**A:** No I was already working at a library and was doing some private tuition in my native language. My husband had also been made redundant and our standard of living had gone down considerably. I just thought that it would be a good thing for the future, to obtain an education and a good job now that my husband was out of work. The whole family thought I should go. At least it would open a few more doors.

Prior to the research interview **Student 84** had written an account, after course commencement, about what Access meant for

her. Some of her points complement the issues raised in her interview:-

As for the timing of it (Access) why I wanted to start studying again at 35, that was the result of a very long process. After my A level (equivalent) in my own country, I came to England, got married, worked in shops and offices and had the children. Throughout all this time I felt somewhat frustrated and dissatisfied and knew there were parts of my brain that were screaming to be stretched and fulfilled ... I learned to live with it and place it on the back burner till a time when I could deal with it. Other periods of more acute crisis in my life co-existed with my personal one, and they had to take precedence.

A combination of Student 84's interview and written account of why Access, makes very real sense in relation to the properties necessary for change discussed above, when students decide to apply to Access. She had anticipated the possibility of change for years, feeling that she was not realising her potential, 'parts of her brain that were screaming to be stretched and fulfilled', but this was held in suspended cultural abeyance, pending the time it was able to be realised in the right cultural circumstances. From further discussions I had with Student 84, one of the main considerations was, like so many of the women on Access, waiting for children to become settled at school, before decisions could be made relating to her own personal future aspirations. In her original application form on the page asking why the person wanted to do Access, she said:-

I am motivated to have a go, since this application form comes

after months and months of thinking and weighing up pros and cons, and finally viewing the course as an investment for the future. In a few years time, if I manage to complete successfully a university degree after this Access course, I will feel deeply satisfied. I am not stepping onto this path merely thinking that I will have a well paid job at the end of it (Although of course that would be nice!), but I want to enter into the world of education once again feeling in control, feeling that I have chosen what I actually want to do.

The story line from application form to the account written while on Access, to the research interview, maintains a continuity of reasons, of meaning. Personal change was desired, was held in check until circumstances prevailed where the move could be made, children growing up, children settling at school, life carrying on, children settled at school, settled in their own lives, time for possible change, and the final circumstance, her husband's redundancy, representing the time to move since Access became an investment for the future for both herself and her family. The story holds true to the three main related themes of the thesis, 'elective affinity', chronological and aeonic time perceptions, morphogenetic journeys.

It holds true to 'elective affinity', right idea, right person, right time, due to the very particular circumstances, confluences, of her story, of her time, of her idea. It also has a morphogenetic feel about, the beginning, moving to England, the middle, working, marrying and having children, the end, children settled, husband redundant, the new beginning,

Access. Finally, the notion of chronological and aeonic time are brought into play, in relation to how her life was moving at the calendrical level of her social position, mother, worker, wife, whilst at the same time within her mind, considering her own journey, her own dreams, her needs, both temporalities fused together with the structural, cultural and familial circumstances that made personal change a reality, fulfilling an elective affinity, completing a personal morphogenesis and displaying the crucial interconnectedness of the three concepts.

The story of **Student 50, 29 year old female**, tells a similar tale, although the content changes, the story line, the morphogenesis, remains intact. First an extract from the research interview:-

**Student 50. 29 year old female.**

**Q:** Why Access?

**A:** My marriage had broken down and I felt isolated. Part time work was not financially viable due to having to pay child care costs for my children. I wanted to do Access straight away but couldn't afford it due to child care costs. I did an ET course in business and got money for childcare from them, and also did a course at college in welfare work. I eventually did Access the following year which on reflection was a good time to do it since I was still getting over my marriage breakdown.

**Student 50** also wrote an account of her circumstances, a reflective view of why she joined Access, while on Access:-

I expected the course to be purely academic and had doubts about whether I would be able to keep up with the work, both

written essays and the reading ... I had been legally separated from my husband the year before and it was a powerful experience, not least because my daughter and son were only 22 months and 4 months of age.

In actual fact I applied for this course in 1992 and been offered a place but because my kids both needed full-time child care, the allowance of £1.10 per course hour was not enough. In retrospect, it was not the right time for me. The challenging nature of the material used during the year would probably have led to my life being turned upside down even more and I doubt if I would have enjoyed that. This year however was perfect timing and I consider it one of the best years of my life. It has been great to start something, knowing no-one and just being 'me'. I'd really lost myself under all the roles I was playing and definitely acted in accordance with everyone else's expectations of me. I felt as though I was living a false existence, just trying to please people around me.

The research interview with Student 50, her written account, and the application form details, as with the other 'case stories' in the Chapter, show a continuity in how the process of self-realisation was occurring, how the circumstances at the time precipitated personal change, enabling the process of self-realisation to get underway. Combining the three sources together we can also see the morphogenesis at work, marriage, children, divorce, realisation of role accumulation, realisation of 'self' denial, care needed for children, application to Access; a new beginning. And again, 'elective affinity' and temporal dimensions to be taken into consideration; person, idea and time, with the latter distinguishable, between the calendrical/cultural path of her life, and the aeonic sense she was making if in her mind.

The connectedness between crisis and change, between chronological and aeonic time, within an 'elective affinity' format need not be as separated and prolonged as most of the stories we have considered so far. Change and crisis for Student 31, a 27 year old male, came in much more dramatic and spontaneous terms. I had several discussions with him over the Access year and obtained some very significant and unusual research material. First though, some extracts from his original application form. All use of brackets and capitals are the student's own:-

I left school at 16 in 1981 to start an engineering apprenticeship at Rolls Royce. The training period was to last until my 20th birthday. The first year was basic training. This was so they and yourself could find out what you were best suited to - it was then I realised that I was not suited to engineering, because I wasn't any good at anything (MACHINING, INSPECTION, ELECTRICAL, WELDING, TIN SMITH, MAINTENANCE etc) you name it and I wasn't interested. To be honest I hated every day of it because it was like being back at school - you against them - the system that I hated at school existed in the factory. After my basic training 'THEY' decided that I would be an inspector. The next 2½ years were as bad as the first one but the only reason I completed my training was because I thought I could do nothing else - this was for me because 'THEY' had told me so at school and they keep telling me now. After my apprenticeship they put me into hell where I have spent the last 7 years - So why have I spent 10 years of my youth in this industrial prison - in a job I have no interest in - simply because I know no different until now - I have only just seen the light - thanks to a friend of mine who gave me a book to read THE RAGGED TROUSERED PHILANTHROPISTS. (The use of capitals and brackets is the student's.)

I want to do Access because I need to get out of the rut I am in. I need to get thinking again because I'm brain dead, typical factory fodder. I need to reach my cause, my destiny. I need to express myself to people who feel the same who will listen and understand. I need to get away from the fools and the horses. I need to regain my confidence. I know I have more in me than being a robot. I have to get away from the brainwashers and manipulators who think nothing of me but a number (56954).

I am in a position to undertake this course because I have seen the light. I am leaving the factory (or H.M.S Prison) to go out and do what I know I have to do. I am leaving my job and my home to do this course so my life style will change dramatically. I think it relates to my previous life experiences because life and people are the best experiences than you can have and we live and learn.

For the first time in my life I am doing what I want to do, instead of doing what my teachers, family, friends, partner, manager, etc., want me to do. They think I am a fool for giving up my £18,000 job and £50,000 home but THEY ARE THE FOOLS.

And now from my conversations with him, the story, not something that sociology, especially of the positivist kind would ever see let alone consider. Student 31 has had been working for a large car company in Coventry, the manufacturers of the world's most prestigious motor car. His father had got him the job since he had already worked with the same company for many years. From his own description, Student 31 had never been politically conscious and according to his own interpretation of events, 'life had been ticking over nicely', a steady job, a steady girlfriend, nothing wrong. His father died suddenly after suffering a heart attack. His funeral was held in a cemetery, a stone's throw from the factory where they both worked. Student 31, said that as his father's coffin was being lowered into the earth, midst sorrow and memories, he looked up and saw the large red-brick factory wall and more importantly, the famous company flag flying in the breeze. He said he felt a sense of awareness, the like of which he had never experienced before. He equated his father's coffin lowering into the ground with the flag flying high and felt

that in so many years he too would be lowered into the ground, in the cemetery, next to the factory.

He could not return to work through the emotional distress of the incident and went sick. The incident played on his mind considerably. Whilst he was off work he was visited by his trade union shop steward at the factory bringing him some union sick benefit. **Student 31** told him why he felt so distressed and why he couldn't contemplate a return to the factory. Later that same week the shop steward brought him a copy of Robert Tressell's classic novel of working class life, 'The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists'. He started to read the book, nonchalantly, but after a while 'couldn't put it down'. In his own words, in relation to the death of his father and the experience at the funeral, 'it changed his life'. He never returned to work but started on Access in the Autumn of that same year, his father dying in the spring. However, the story is not played out. What appeared to be an end is in fact a beginning for another player, **Student No. 44**, the 32 year old male, whose story was discussed earlier in the Chapter.

Several weeks after the death of his father **Student 31**, approached a friend (**Student 44**) to come and complete the decoration of a room in the house, which his father had been re-decorating immediately prior to his death. When his friend arrived, during the course of the decoration, **Student 31** told



Student 44 his story, as told above, and Student 44 told him his own story of his disillusionment with his work, he was a painter in a large car factory. Student 31 gave Student 44, the copy of 'Ragged Trousered' and like Student 31, such was the impact of the novel on his own alienated position at the car factory, he also tendered his resignation several weeks later and joined Student 31 on Access in the Autumn of that year. On his application form Student 44 wrote the following:-

One day I found myself and felt myself becoming more and more like the people around me ie wanting overtime and thinking how lucky I was to have a job then BANG! I read a book called The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists and my life has never been the same. What a waste of 14 years stuck in a crap rut.

Both went on to study sociology at University in the Coventry area. One finale to the story (perhaps not, one never knows) to the story is that Student 44's wife has just started the Access this Autumn, as her husband commences his second year at university and has also been offered a place at the same university.

The story is fascinating in many respects and extremely important in the complex and somewhat 'mysterious' network of how so many students come to hear of Access at a very relevant and precise time in their lives, 'elective affinity', the 'right time', the 'right idea', the 'right person'. The main theme of the thesis is the notion of 'journeys', of 'beginnings', 'middles' and 'ends'. The biographical, familial,

cultural or structural landmarks, which seem to offer 'social' or even 'life' crossroads to the traveller, as both agent, actor and more; sometimes the diversion, the change, is taken, sometimes not, depending on the time and place, and the conscious moment. **Student No. 31's** experience at the cemetery by the factory gates and the emphasis of the company flag flying in the wind, is a classic one. A biographical, familial, cultural and structural crossroads all at one and the same time. The time was right, the place was massively significant, and the moment was consciously realised. Something ending, something beginning, a crossroads of potential and dramatic change in both consciousness and life style. Enter the shop steward, enter Robert Tressell, guides on the journey, one living one dead, (Interactionists please note), guiding at exactly the right time and place. Enter friend, **Student 44**, to complete the father's decoration, Tressell is passed on. Enter **Student 44's** wife, Tressell is passed on again, she has since told me she has read the book with the same massive effects and recently introduced the book to a friend who has now applied to do Access.

What are we dealing with here? At one level, at the very least, certainly a very complex communications network in terms of people actually hearing about Access, and secondly, an incredible accompanying compatibility between the moment of hearing about Access and the availability of the person to want

to do the same. It appears to them at exactly the right time and for the exact right reasons, as part of negative work experiences, something good came out of something bad for **Students 31 and 44**, something very significant to their moment enabling them to choose which path to take at that particular point of their lives.

'Circumstances prevailing' is not a phrase compatible with human society, for the prevailing structural, cultural and biographical circumstances rarely prevail, especially within the dynamics of what sociologists call modernity. Durkheim's concept of 'anomie' seems to be something of a self-propelling social force; normlessness begets normlessness. Rural Feudalism as a main economic epoch, from a Marxist perspective, may have slept for centuries as Durkheim sees it, in its 'mechanical like' slumbers, its routinised division of labour, producing what Archer refers to in her morphogenetic approach, as 'Morphostasis', but when things do move, apparently, they really move.

Modernity may not be a passing phrase, that can be remedied by Durkheim's social solidarity medicine, or one that will burn its capitalist fever out in social communism as diagnosed by Marx, or even one that will stifle itself in bureaucratic quagmires, as prophesied by Weber, but rather one that **its discontents, clashes and unwanted outcomes, may well generate its own dynamics from its own dynamics, self-perpetuating,**

self-propelling, until the rapidity of its change becomes identifiable as the main one of its properties. Paradoxically, its morphogenesis may become its morphostasis, its changing nature, and the nature of its change may become its continuity of progression, always in a state of change, always in a state of 'sameness'; perpetual anomie.

The lives of those considered in this thesis, the one hundred and seventeen Access students, were experiencing change, either anticipated or non-anticipated, marriage and children, redundancy and illness, continuity or crisis or most probably both. Sometimes by its very nature, routinisation begets change, a desire for change that was laying dormant in the mind and cultural experience within the biography of the individual, which may then be triggered into activation by a concatenation of circumstances. Unanticipated crisis can break monotony and bring great change, anticipated change can bring realisation of monotony and bring crisis and bring greater change. The former may sometimes be the lot of the working class male factory worker, facing redundancy, or the working class woman facing marital breakdown; the latter may be the working class woman enrolling on Access as the children are settled in school, but that very enrolment may unsettle her own life circumstances. Access can be an irreversible process. Like the heroine in Shaw's 'Pygmalion' there can often be no return to what was before; the clock cannot be put back.

As Higgins ultimately discovers, to his surprise .. that he has not merely given the Cockney Galatea a superficial polish, and shown how to turn a sow's ears into silk purses: he has awakened a human soul'. [Keeling, 1976: 11.]

### **Moments**

Student 31's experience can be seen as such a moment, an awakening of sorts, a feeling of self-realisation, when he became acutely aware of the factory flag blowing in the distance as his father's coffin was lowered into the ground, only a hundred yards or so from the place he had worked all of his life. The realisation was instant, intense, and overwhelming. It changed the course of his life and he could not return to the same factory where he had worked alongside his father; the future seemed very predictable, the future seemed very controlled, the future seem very dismal.

The company flag had signalled the time for change. Clearly, there were no direct structural interventions in the student's life, he had not been made redundant, nor from my discussions with him, had he felt any feeling of discontent. However, the death of his father, a sudden change in his family situation, had alerted him to his cultural position as a working class man, with the company flag signifying the structural routineness of what his father's life had been and what could be expected for his own life. He was literally stopped in his tracks. His personal biography was experiencing dramatic family change, the death of his father, but through fate, affinity,

coincidence or whatever, he had drawn a biographical, familial, cultural and structural linkage, as the company flag flew in the sky, over factory and cemetery, and his father, a loved one and an employee, was lowered into the ground.

There was an article in the Guardian some years ago, written by a former British Rail worker, who at the time of writing was a mature university student at Sussex University. In the article, appropriately titled, 'The Man Who Jumped the Train Gang', Bryan Maddock wrote about why he left his manual job with British Rail and why he came to be a mature student and what it meant for his life. His story bears parallels with the Access student's story above, and how the routinisation of work can suddenly strike one as indeed the routinisation of work. He writes:-

... I was 47 years old and before going to university I had been employed exclusively as a 'blue collar worker.' I had worked for British rail for virtually the whole of my adult life. I had been a labourer, machinist, riveter and welder. I had left for a brief period and then returned to work as a trackman on the permanent way.

Towards the end of this second stint on the railway there is one particular night that is still graphically etched on my memory. It was two in the morning and raining heavily. The job that the gang had gone on night shift to do had been cancelled because of an engine failure. To pass the time we were ordered to take our shovels and clean up the cess on the down road. Moving stones which had lain undisturbed for many years. Custom decreed that we had to be found a job, any job, even one that was totally unnecessary. Anyone who's worked on the track for any time could tell a dozen similar stories.

I stabbed my blade into the unwilling ballast; moved my flickering tilley lamp from one wet sleeper to the next; reminded myself that the juice wasn't switched off; looked at

my watch; wiped my soaking face with the drenched sleeve of my PVC raincoat and took stock of the situation. Twenty years doing boring, arduous, unrewarding work is a long, long time. And that night my future looked black and uninviting as the middle of Clayton Tunnel.

My thoughts turned to money and the modest tastes that a British Rail wage failed to meet. In all the years of my employment there had never been an even brief period when my wage for a basic week had covered the essential needs of rent,

food, gas and electricity. Simply to survive it had always been necessary to work some overtime. To achieve anything more than survival even longer hours had to be endured. In my present situation that meant working at least six, and often seven, shifts on the shovel instead of five. It was shortly reaching this personal nadir that I discovered higher education.

Abruptly terminating 20 years of mundane labour to take a degree is a rare step to take. A fact that has been confirmed by my time at the University of Sussex I met no-one whose background was anything like as extreme as mine..

At first much of my thinking was negative, dominated by a profound sense of relief that I was no longer on the railway. Every other day I would ride the train in the campus and somewhat immaturely look eagerly out of the window, hoping to see my ex-mates on the track. Occasionally I would catch a glimpse of a 'high visibility jacket' or hear the ominous scrape of a shovel on a concrete sleeper as the train slowed down. Then, I would sink back in my seat, safe in the knowledge that at last I had said goodbye to all that. [Maddock, The Guardian, September, 5th, 1986]

'Maddock's moment', so-to-speak, came in an instant, though behind it a long trail of dissatisfaction, never fully realised until the 'crossroads' that fateful night, 'still graphically etched on Maddock's memory'. Such a moment is very similar to the **Student 31's** moment of flag, father and future. Journeys do not always stick to the straight and narrow. The notion of a real physical journey, in the moving sense, cars, trains, boats and planes, often provides one with an opportunity to

think about life issues, large or small, to look at lives passing you by through the train carriage window; or to look at the scenery and movement of the natural world, trees, rivers, seas, clouds. The scenery is movement.

Biographical journeys like physical journeys are no less illuminating and similarly do not always stick to the straight and narrow. Quite often the sense of journey, like the physical travelling, is not realised whilst you are actually 'travelling', and it is only when one 'begins' or 'ends' one's journey that one has a sense of the same. Virginia Wolfe talked about 'moments of being' when suddenly, but briefly we have a sense of bringing it all together, life that is, it may be that there are similar moments, when we feel a 'moment of non-being' when we feel that we have not got it all together, life that is, and the impetus for change is clearly signposted before us.

This Chapter has looked in depth at such moments, when working class people, culturally alienated during their school days, (Chapter Three), personally alienated to a large degree by their working life, (Chapter Four), are activated into change by change itself, marital breakdown, redundancy children settled at school, (Chapter Five). The catalysts for change, can be structural, cultural, familial, biographical and/or combinations of all four, providing the traveller with a crossroads, that brings to the fore, their past, their moment



and visions of their future, elective affinity, chronological and aeonic time concepts, interconnected change and crisis factors, all within a morphogenetic framework.

## CONCLUSIONS

### CULTURAL PATTERNS AND BIOGRAPHICAL MAPS

#### **Cultural morphogenesis; change begets change**

Having considered, the 'Education Profiles', the 'Work Profiles', and the 'Personal Profiles' we have in essence considered 'beginnings', 'middles', 'ends' and 'new beginnings', of a continuous and continuing, biographical, familial, cultural, structural story. The 'birth culture' of the Access students, their working 'classness', represented their structurally disadvantaged cultural position in society. Their cultural beginning was thus, culturally defined for them, without choice, without say, without much hope of ever attaining, or seeking to attain a university education. The cultural acceptance and apathy contained in the information identified in the 'Education Profiles', as was previously mentioned, spoke volumes by its lack of volume. Cultural apathy and acceptance lead to cultural pragmatism, 'che sera sera'. The culturally bequeathed beginning was well under way and was doing as well as could be expected under the cultural circumstances, the largely unintended historical legacy of structural and agency interplay of other stratified past generations; the continuance of the cultural patterns seemed assured.

However, cultural patterns are by no means a static entity, because cultural socialisation processes do not necessarily

hold true for life. For such a thing to occur, the process taught, would indeed have to be so consensual that it becomes something of a brain-washing exercise, so stifling in its entirety that it becomes a dictatorial consensus, and it would have to hold the structural line every second of every minute of every hour of every day, which of course it could never do. History gives testimony to change, that is to structural, cultural, familial and biographical movement. From a morphogenetic perspective, change begets change, and change belies consuming structural consensus, belies consuming structural control, belies simplistic theories of either econoministic or value-consensual control.

Thus the cultural lives of the Access students were undoubtedly working class, from the evidence of their application forms and where they came from, their culturally conditioned beginning, but from the evidence of their story lines, such a culturally defined starting point did not hold over time. Indeed, rather than being the catalyst for cultural stasis, their working 'classness', or rather the cultural limitations of it, became the impetus for massive cultural and personal movement, based on a complexity of structural conditioning, cultural conditioning, socio-cultural interaction, cultural breakdown, cultural reaction and cultural reformation. Old orders produce new beginnings.

Cultural disadvantage does appear to have some Phoenix-like properties and what other 'Big Birds' failed to accomplish through structured, formal, educational intervention, uneducationally qualified people accomplished through informal cultural life experience, often through very personally painful lessons, but generating very quickly, high grades in heightened self and societal analysis, of cultural time and place. Lyndon Johnson's attempt at structural intervention in the lives of the culturally disadvantaged, the 'Head Start' programme for the underprivileged, could not compensate for the **real 'head start' of the culturally privileged in the USA.** Neither could the designated educational priority areas in this country compensate for the real EPA's the 'educational privileged areas' which has more to do with social class than regional variations. In contrast to the failure of the sixties programmes, successful compensatory 'Head Starts' such as Access, are of particular use since the person left behind in the cultural race is not only aware of their handicap but also aware of the significance of cultural incentives to help them run faster, to help them catch up.

Birth culture may indeed bequeath cultural handicaps, the race may be unfair, the starting points far from equal, but realisation of the situation, due to crisis or change, can quicken the pace considerably, especially when structurally designed programmes, 'ideas' such as Access, are not only available but perceived and utilised by certain social groups

who are keenly aware of their significance to them; 'elective affinity' again, right idea, right people, right time. It would appear from the students experience of school, of work, of personal life, that the more handicaps, in both quantity and severity, the greater the realisation of the situation, the greater the determination to catch up. In real terms for the Access students, such a situation often means returning to the starting point where the race was first lost, education, the beginning becoming a new beginning, the culturally 'loaded' start, a culturally redefined start. But of course none of this may have happened but for the significance of change in their lives, crisis or otherwise, changing their ideas about who they are, their past and what they want, their future.

Thus culturally formed 'ideas' like culturally formed patterns, are by no means a static entity, their core is their changeability, their dynamics, their susceptibility to socio-cultural influences through socio-cultural interaction. People keep hold of some old ideas, shed others, amalgamate the old with the new, all in relation to their own structural, cultural time and place and the degree of advantage or disadvantage of life chances and quality of life. Ideas reflect not only our cultural moment but also our cultural legacy, bequeathed, sometimes intentionally and sometimes not, by the ideas of previous generations, but also our cultural future, what we see and what we would like to happen, and what we may unintentionally or otherwise bequeath to others.

Ideas are part of the ontology of living, reflecting biographical, cultural and structural properties of both past and present, and anticipated futures. Ideas are formed, maintained or changed by experience, by living, and thus experience is a biographical, cultural and structural source of epistemology, reinforcing or refuting the individual's, the social group's, the collectivity's, societal ontology. But it is not all a matter of agency, for the movement of ideas is part of the movement of society, and the movement of society is in part the movement of ideas; ideational properties and changes relate to societal properties and changes and vice versa, via their unique temporal interplay, that can only be separately teased out and understood in terms of their unique compatibility (or contradiction), by unravelling them, by travelling the same path; the signposted social journey of temporal biographical/cultural/structural separateness and fusion, from the onset to the end, and the new onset.

#### **Access students as 'Ideal Types' or 'Extreme Types'**

The research indicates strongly that the Access students travelled certain cultural roads, from the apathy and acceptance of school, through the alienation of work to the activation of change which propelled many of them on to Access. They told a story, in the morphogenetic sense of the word, with a beginning, a middle and an end, culminating in a new cultural beginning, Access. The extremely high incidence of crisis, of change, of a combination of both prior to joining Access, lead

to a change of ideas about the future, university entry, which acquired a different cultural meaning from that of their majority cultural base. In this sense they do represent the specific and not the general of their cultural kind. In a Weberian sense they could be referred to as 'ideal types'.

Since the notion of the ideal type is to draw up a social picture of what it means to be such and such, as Weber did with the Calvinist, then the content analysis of the Access students in terms of their education and work experience provides a culturally meaningful picture, of who they are, the specifics of how they may differ from other working class people in terms of their cultural meaning, culminating in their desire to enter higher education. From such a theoretical perspective two ideal types identified in the research are the ones where people's lives are undergoing crisis or change, the most likely Access students. Of course most people in different social groupings, middle class and working class, for instance, experience crises/changes in their lives but the difference with Access students is the relationship of anticipated or non-anticipated life changes to their decision to undertake Access.

Thus there may be something of a continuum of crisis and change, a polarisation of the two, and within the two polar extremes the significance of crises/changes of the Access students may be sufficient to trigger off further change. Since it is the Access students themselves who are writing their own

story, on the application forms, (I am interpreting them sociologically and morphogenetically) then in a sense they are not 'ideal types' at all, since I have not methodologically conjured up a picture (a one-sided accentuation) of what the typical Access student is like. They are what they are in reality based on their own testimony; the broken relationships, the redundancies, the changing status of children, the death of relatives, are written down for all to see. In her discussion re the relationship between social movement (morphogenesis) and non-social movement (morphostasis) Margaret Archer states:

Logically, there are four basic combinations between morphostatic and morphogenetic cycles in the structural and the cultural domains. As exemplifications of each readily spring to mind, they are clearly more than theoretical extrapolations and are perhaps best considered as extreme types. **In contrast to Ideal Types they are found in reality**, so their discussion entails no-sided theoretical accentuations, nevertheless, in relation to the bulk of empirical incidences **they are extreme instances of perfect conjunction or total discontinuity. Probably this makes them rarities in reality**, for the majority of cases are more likely to occupy slots between these two poles. [Archer, 1992: 288-289.] (The stress is mine.)

Although dealing with structural and cultural components and their relationship to social stasis or social change, Archer's belief in the usefulness of 'extreme types' rather than 'ideal types', as being based in reality, is of significance to an understanding of the position of the Access students, the change and crisis factors and combinations of both; their significance as extreme types, their crises, their life changes, and thus why they changed their ideas, why they are on Access and why ultimately they desire university entry.



Many types of change have been identified from an analysis of the students biographical notes, under the two umbrella terms of anticipated and non-anticipated life changes; under the former, children starting school, children left school, children left home, moving house, deciding to live with someone and under the latter, relationship breakdown, redundancy, ill-health, death of a relative. Now using Archer's 'extreme types', rather than Weber's 'ideal types', acknowledging that the students experiences are based on their own biographical testimonies, hence '**found in reality**', we can put together a simple schema of the crisis/change continuum.

FIG: 1.

<--Extreme types--	--Slots in between--	--Extreme types-->
Married	-----	Marital breakdown
Employed	-----	Redundant/unemployed
Job satisfaction	-----	Boredom/alienation
Good health	-----	Poor health
Relatives alive	-----	Death of relative
Children at home	-----	Children left home
Long residence	-----	moving house

Obviously the above is a very basic schema indeed, for definitions of what each category constitutes in reality, would need teasing out much more, but nevertheless could still hold true to the 'extreme type' by virtue of the 'reality' of each person's empirical make-up. Clearly, definitions of job

satisfaction, lack of job satisfaction, are more subjective than whether a person is married or not married, or married and then divorced and this indeed may mean us using a combination of both Archer's 'extreme types' and Weber's 'ideal types', with significant scope for permutations of both. The most obvious being that we could start off with an extreme type in relation to objectively identifiable factors, married or not, divorced or not, relatives dead or not, and then using this as our methodological base, build a 'subjective cultural identikit', by utilising something akin to an 'ideal type'. Pierre Bourdieu has been using something not too dissimilar in his more recent work, in terms of predictability of people's cultural tastes in relation to their socio-economic position.

With regards the Access students, FIG. 1. incorporating a variation of 'extreme types' although basic, is a very useful methodological tool, since it illuminates that the students had experienced significant personal change, redundancy, broken relationships, ill-health, death of relatives, changes in status of children etc, objective realities, so-to-speak, but by the very fact that they chose to write this on their application forms as reasons for undertaking Access, then the objective structural 'social facts' are supported by the subjective cultural testimonies; the empirically objective changes and crises subjectively meant something to them in relation to their Access application.

Having thus established 'social facts' such as married, employed, divorced, unemployed, (structural cultural poles), then there are the more phenomenological properties to consider, 'what does this mean to the social occupant of the role', ie. very happily married, quite happily married, 'just holding-in- there, looking to get out, looking for another partner, or very happy at work, quite happy at work, just 'holding-in-there', looking for another job, or, health-excellent, health-fair, health-'just holding-in-there', looking for another doctor.

Problems of what 'social facts' and 'social factors' mean as 'social acts' and for 'social actors' is where the objective meets the subjective, where the statistical meets the interpretive, where the structural meets the agential, for society and ideas of society, are crucial to an understanding of each. For society, and advantaged and disadvantaged cultural positions (inherited and changed) and ideas of society, how the advantage or disadvantage is/was (present and past) experienced (accepted or rejected, plus degrees of both) may be the ultimate and temporal linkage between the structural, the cultural, and the personal.

It would be useful, even necessary, in much more detailed research of this kind, to devise two basic schemas (and probably many more related ones) as in FIG 1, one reflecting objective life categories, married, divorced, employed, unemployed, educational qualifications, lack of educational

qualifications, and one reflecting subjective, cultural life perceptions of those same 'objective' structural, cultural positions; what marriage means to the person, what divorce means to the person, what having a job means, what unemployment means, what having substantial educational qualifications means, what having little or no educational qualifications means, and how such factors affected them and other life decisions.

Of course what these social factors mean, is pertinent to what one's culture means, and what one's culture means is pertinent to one's thinking, what ideationally it means to be working class, to be middle class, to be man, to be woman, to be working class man, to be middle class woman, one's ethnicity, one's religion etc. This in turn relates to one's cultural position(s) in relation to the structural honeycomb and other people's cultural position(s) and ideational thinking, and the time and place of both hive, bees and types of bees, not forgetting other non-social factors, availability of flowers, availability of pollen.

#### **Changing cultural scope, cumulative cultural entities**

The situation is by no means static, since by definition of morphogenetic movement over time, societies and who comprises societies (in terms of their cultural groupings) becomes more sophisticated due to the constant defining and re-defining of cultural positions, and as such Access students may not be such

a rarity in future years. Just as Archer views cultural variety as creating cultural variety, she applies similar morphogenetic dynamics to specialisms creating specialisms with the subsequent development, cultural dissection, of social groups. She states:-

To view progressive specialization from the outside is to see the proportional exclusion of vast tracts of the population from larger and larger proportions of specialist knowledge. The division of the population into laymen and experts is repeated over and over again as each new specialism emerges. This is a horizontal form of differentiation quite unlike ... vertical stratification ... Where specialization becomes advanced, the differentiated cultural maps that sectional groupings carry in their heads may give more meaning to that dubious phrase about inhabiting 'different cultural worlds' than it has in its contexts. Hence it would operate as an extreme type with no overlapping features, except language, which Socio-Culturally would mean no conversation. [Archer, 1992: 268.]

However all is not lost for what society breaks up, society provides the adhesive to repair, splinters re-assemble to make new socially constructed wood, in many new forms of cultural furniture. Such a scenario is similar to my earlier criticism of Laing, when he hoped ... 'that society would set up places whose express purpose would be to help people through the stormy passages of' a voyage of self-discovery rather than seeing them as mentally ill and curing them. His conclusions as you may recall ... 'A considerable part of this book has been devoted to showing why this is unlikely'. [Laing, 1992: 137.] My criticism of such an approach was that society provides both nettles and dock leaves, and that such places as Laing calls for, experimented with, are already there, are created anew, by the complexity of structure and agency interaction over time.

Laing's call for such places can be seen as an phenomenological 'social engineering cousin' of Durkheim's positivistic remedies to cement organic society and stop it coming apart at the specialised seams.

So where Laing was worried about **over-conformity and the destructive effects on the human spirit**, wanting monastic retreats, promoting non-regulative and non-integrative outlooks, Durkheim was worried about **over-individuality and the destructive effects on society**, wanting equalising socio-medicine, of a regulative and integrative kind. Dr. Phenomenology and Dr. Positivism, though far from being quacks, were at one and the same time too curative and too preventative by far in both diagnosis and social treatment plan, and may have learnt lessons from the 'natural healing' brigade, of leaving well alone, or in Laing's and Durkheim's case, 'physician heal thyself!' I suppose it all depends on the premise that, how you read the body will determine how you read the malady. For morphogenecists, time and place are crucial factors.

Our time and our place also ties in with Weber's notion of 'elective affinity'. Taking Access as the idea, taking the Access students as the cultural group going through change or crisis and taking the structural properties of our present society as the historical backdrop for the 'idea' and the 'social group' to come together, then 'elective affinity' seems

a reasonable methodological proposition for explaining the structural, cultural, biographical fusion between them. A methodological combination of 'elective affinity' and 'ideal type', as used by Weber in both the macroscopic and microscopic sense is seen by many as a first sociological foundation between bridging that gap between structure and agency. The morphogenetic approach gives us more.

According to Archer, the concept of 'elective affinity' is over-simplified in sociological theory and subsequently becomes something of a meaningless proposition in explaining a certain congruence between a certain group and a certain idea. She writes:

There has been an unfortunate tendency in social theory for such considerations to be bundled together under the blanket of 'elective affinities'. This is unhelpful because simply to stipulate that there must be 'congruence' between a group and the ideas it adopts can be construed in so many ways that at any one time a given group will have multiple 'affinities' (several sets of ideas which meet this loose requirement. [Archer, 1992: 206.]

From a morphogenetic approach, elective affinity only makes theoretical sense, and is therefore methodologically useful, if considered in relation to what could be described as factors which constitute bonuses and penalties. Thus, Archer's analysis of the conditions under which such a process occurs are very significant and can be applied to Access students as a group and Access as the idea. In order to do this some of the complexities of Archer's discussion have had to be reduced, but

nevertheless the methodological implications remain true to her belief in the need for 'analytical dualism' and its usefulness in making true 'elective affinities' more specific, and thereby more trackable from a morphogenetic perspective. Thus what follows is a very simplified methodological interpretation of Archer's 'formula', which hopefully does not lead to a distortion of what she is saying.

Thus, the first condition of the process is 'the social availability of a pool of ideas which stand in logical contradiction to A'. [Archer, 1992: 205.] Thus incorporating this within the cultural realms of Access and Access students, if we call A at this level 'working class culture', and the pool of ideas as Access preparation for university. Thus most working class people would not, and do not consider Access as an option, since from their cultural base university is not a consideration, fitting in with the overall cultural relationship (or rather non-relationship) of working class people and a predominantly middle class education system. (demonstrated in a wealth of educational studies and importantly in Chapter Three, the 'Education Profiles', cultural conditioning, 'the beginning'). As such the idea of say A levels, or university degree stands in cultural contradiction to working class cultural thinking. The idea of a working class person wanting to go to university, is still enough of a rarity to be the stuff of popular or 'very' popular fiction, 'Educating Rita', 'Pygmalion' etc. 'When a dog bites a



man that is not news, when a man bites a dog that is news'; when a middle class person goes to university that is not news, when a working class person goes to university that is news, especially newsworthy amongst the cultural grouping from which they stem. One wonders how relevant Boudon's positional theory is to working class adults, who make a cross cultural move. They may not lose their play friends but they may lose their partners, their leisure time acquaintances. **The main point is that Access as part of a 'pool of ideas' stands in contradiction to working class culture, A.**

The second condition Archer identifies is the communication process of hearing about the ideas. Thus she writes 'these await detection and what can be termed 'registration' at the CS (Cultural System) level, preferably being lodged there in writing if groups elsewhere in space and time are to have much chance of gaining access to them'. [Archer, 1992: 205.] These conditions can be seen to be compatible with Access, documented, written down, publicised. Add further to this, my own devised and designed application form, the 'ideas' contained within it, are even more pertinent to those 'seeking' the idea.

Thirdly, Archer discusses the importance of what I have described as the push/pull factor in her morphogenetic interpretation of the 'elective affinity' process. In this respect the final conditions ... 'revolve around group "c"

actually adopting an ideational C which stands in particular CS (Cultural System) relations vis a vis A and S-C (Socio-cultural) relations vis a vis "a".' [Archer, 1992: 206.] Thus, in relation to the Access students, stressing their working 'classness', calling them 'c', then by seeking to enter university, they are in essence seeking to adopt cultural ideas, middle class called C, which stand in opposition the working class cultural thinking, A. Archer continues:-

At the CS level (Cultural System) there must be logical consistency between the avowed interest group 'c' and the ideas C which it adopts from those which are both objectively available and socially accessible. Equally important, there must be logical inconsistency between the two sets of ideas A and C. This is of course where the notion of an 'elective affinity' turns out to be much wider than the concept of competitive contradiction. [Archer, 1992: 206.]

Thus, in relation to Access and Access students, they as 'c' have a strong desire to enter university, based on their renewed personal interest in education as a result of crisis or change in their cultural base, and the prospect of university entrance, is 'objectively available and socially accessible' through Access. 'Equally important' there is a logical inconsistency between working class cultural ideas A and the middle class cultural 'idea' and ideas of university. Hence, the Access students by moving from one base to another, being painfully pushed, in many cases due to personal crisis, or gently shoved in other cases due to anticipated life change within their cultural boundaries, and feeling the 'pull' of returning to education, with intention to enter university are

fulfilling the terms of the more finely specified, 'elective affinity'.

### **Individuals fighting back**

Thus, what we have found out about the morphogenetic approach with its emphasis on analytic dualism is that it is applicable to either macroscopic or microscopic considerations, with morphogenetic linkage between the two, and is capable of untangling the problem of structure and agency, by acknowledgement of structural, cultural conditioning over time and the response of agency to such conditioning and the importance of that response being able to bring some change to bear on the conditioning, over time. The individual is of course of crucial importance, but the development of the individual is conditioned, as is also what the individual can do about such conditioning, if they realise not only the conditioning process but also they feel disadvantaged due to their cultural position within society.

For we are all born into and can only live embedded in an ideational context which is not of our own making. Our very knowledge about it, our vested interests in rejecting it or retaining it and our objective capacities for changing it have already been distributed to us before the action starts. [Archer, 1992: xxii.]

Nevertheless, all is not lost individually, to the structure, to the culture, since ...

... the existence of cultural constraints should never be taken as an endorsement of cultural Determinism, partly because the structural conditioning of material interests is also operative in the same 'present' and pulling in different directions. More

importantly, however, is the quintessential reflective ability of human beings to fight back against their conditioning (not nullifying it for if nothing else it dictates language and topic), giving them the capacity to respond with originality to their present context. (Specifically they do this either by taking advantage of inconsistencies within it and then generating new forms of syncretism and pluralism from it, or by exploring novel combinations of compatible elements within it and the advancing new types of systemization and specialization in the field of ideas. [Archer, 1992: pxxiv.] (The stress is mine.)

In terms of their cultural conditioning, their working 'classness', Access students, by any standard, are 'fighting back' against the cultural odds both from where they are coming from and where they intend going, 'fighting back' with 'originality to their present context', by enrolling on Access, for the reasons they do, the reasons we have considered. Indeed their cultural conditioning meant that they could not culturally bury their heads in the sand, attempting to nullify cultural constraints, such as 'language structures and topic', which they had to take on board if their entry to university was to be successful, hence their Access application. Specifically, they took 'advantage of inconsistencies' within 'the structural conditioning of material interests', the modern capitalist economy, 'pulling in different directions', creating unemployment and also places for the unemployed, including return to study programmes for mature people, such as the Access initiative.

### **Personal Morphogenesis: Final facts, final tracks**

All stories have beginnings and all beginnings come to an end,

and from the morphogenetic perspective, that end is the middle part of the story line. From school, and from minimum educational qualifications, as could be culturally expected, the Access students commenced their adult **working** class life, at **work**. The 'Work Profiles' indicated that work inevitably meant, factory, office, shop or work in the tertiary sector. The employment catalyst was either mundane manual duties or mundane mental duties or a combination of the two. In contrast to the lack of information derived from the 'Education Profiles' the 'Work Profiles' contained a wealth of culturally quantitative and qualitative meaningful detail, emphasising the very unhappy state of affairs existing for the vast majority of the Access students during their working lives.

The message was very much one of personal alienation, of boredom, of lack of job satisfaction, of poor wages, of non-realisation of potential. The cultural apathy, acceptance and pragmatism of education was clearly replaced by the cultural alienation and resentment of work. School life had an end in sight, when work life began. Work life was what it was, and apparently had no end, the minimum school leaving age of sixteen replaced by the minimum work leaving age of sixty five. This was the lot of the Access students. Their future seemed culturally assured.

The main glimmers of light within the mundaneness of it all was social interaction with other working class people in the same

cultural boat. Forty four students, the highest recorded response to any factor examined in the study, identified 'working with people' as the part of their working life where the main personal happiness was found. Like Beynon's Ford workers, they had dreams, but their dreams were not so much the stuff of fairy tales but of cultural tales, of stories of the culturally disadvantaged. The more disadvantaged, the greater the restrictions in fulfilling the dream and the greater the opportunity costs in attempting to do so; cultural dreams can easily change to cultural nightmares. All things considered, there was a lot to consider, not least financial and cultural stability/security, albeit a culturally tenuous one. Ninety one of the one of the hundred and seventeen made a definite choice to attempt cultural change only after being influenced by another change in their lives. The middle was only to change by the end, and in many instances such change was of the unanticipated cultural variety, crisis.

The 'Personal Profiles' revealed a lot, bringing together the story line, making sense of the 'educational beginning', the 'work middle' and the unintended 'cultural end' and 'new beginning'. Ninety one students mentioned change in their lives, more often than not, immediately prior to starting Access. Of the ninety one, thirty eight, all female, mentioned anticipated life changes, associated entirely with changes in family situation, children starting school, settled at school, leaving school, leaving home. Thus in relation to the thesis

title, 'A study of the interplay between structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors affecting mature students' decisions to undertake an Open Access course for possible entry to university' we can say that regarding working class women, the emphasis is very much on the 'familial' as the main contributing factor in such a decision. Clearly, family factors are part of the structural-cultural framework of wider society, and as such the 'familial' represents of course, the tip of the cultural iceberg for women, as has been identified by most feminist research.

#### **Cumulative cultural handicaps and considerable decisions**

Beneath the social waters, the submerged structural mass of the visible familial apex, rests the combined structural and cultural properties of social class and gender. So as cultural losers (by definition of their gender allocation at birth), all of the Access women experienced further disadvantage, by virtue of their working class position. Drawing a horse racing analogy with societal cultural chances, one wonders what stratified odds a bookmaker would give for certain social groups undertaking a university degree? Knowledge of the culturally advantaged disadvantaged groups would suggest that working class black women entering university might for instance be given odds of 100/1, whilst at the top of the tree, white middle class men would be given 2/1 favourite odds.

It would appear there is only one thing worse than being born woman and that is being born working class woman; it would appear that there is only one thing worse than being born working class woman and that is being born working class black woman, etc. However, since the course comprised both females and males, black and white, disabled and non-disabled, the cultural separateness of their disadvantaged positions finds common ground in their social class, their working 'classness' being the culturally binding common denominator. Referring once more to the horse racing analogy it is clear that cultural handicaps are by no means singular but rather cumulative. The more culturally cumulative the disadvantage, the greater the problems in seeking to move from such a disadvantaged position to a more culturally advantageous one. Thus, black working class women, especially those from Asian backgrounds are very rare occupants of either Access or University places. The socially disadvantaged have a lot to consider when deciding on a move, and the greater the disadvantage, the more considerable the decision.

### **Change and crisis; emerging patterns**

As stated earlier, the decision for many of the women on Access was clearly related to changes in the status of their children. Such changes, described as anticipated in the research, culturally released the women to consider their own biographical position and hence the move to enhancing their educational qualifications via Access as an alternative route



to University. The term, 'anticipated life change' refers to the expected change in matters familial rather than the unintended, unforeseen consequences of such a change might have on the consciousness of the woman, even moreso, the change in perception that participation on an Access course may fuel, not least the daily interaction with 'crisis people', comparing cultural notes, but then again this is a different story to that of why people join Access in the first place, which thus means that, (re-quoting Archer) '... the concepts and theories we employ to deal with this next cycle may well have to change in order to explain this change our subject matter has undergone'. [Archer, 1995: 91.]

### **'Crisis'; non-anticipated change**

Although thirty eight students were experiencing anticipated changes in the their life situation, a further sixty two students had or were experiencing a non-anticipated life change, a breakdown of relationship, divorce, separation, redundancy, a period of acute ill-health etc. which in turn had fuelled their desire to make something of a new start in life, by seeking entry to University via Open Access. Clearly, with their life often in a state of acute personal anomie, many students felt there really was nothing to lose by such a venture, since to all intents and purposes the cultural mould had been severely broken by unforeseen, unanticipated crisis situations. Experiencing such anomic zig-zags on their anticipated cultural path, the tendency seems to be one of

going with the flow, taking advantage of disadvantage, turning something bad into something good, changing negative unanticipated change into positive anticipated change, by seeking to enhance their educational qualifications via Access to enable entry to University. When blown off course, many seem to have opted for new uncharted waters through the eye of the storm, rather than attempting to steer their biographical cultural storyline back on course to its original birth passage which had clearly and painfully failed them.

### **The 'People Factor'**

Thirty nine students identified 'wanting to work with people' in their 'Personal Profiles', the second highest category total in the research, significantly giving first place to 'working with people' in their 'Work Profiles', forty four students. The fact that these two categories are the frontrunners is significant to one of the themes of the thesis, the personal/cultural alienation of working class people due to lack of educational qualifications, experience of mundane employment and a desire to 'have a job working with people rather than things'. Thus a further significant pattern is identified, perhaps best described as 'the people factor'. Thus, the clear message from Chapter Six, 'New Beginnings' was that the 'new directions', the future spoken of by many, was one associated with 'working with people', as opposed to their past of 'working with things'.

### **Main patterns**

At this point then, some clear and significant patterns are emerging from the material in the three Profile sections: first, that working class people are the 'natural' cultural inhabitants of the Access course; second, that the vast majority found school a non-eventful, non-meaningful experience; third, that work was to say the least an alienating experience for the majority; fourth, that those who decided on Access through anticipated life changes were all women; fifth, that a great number of students, fifty three in all, (the highest figure anywhere in the research when cumulations are taken into account) decided on Access after a crisis situation in their lives; sixth, that combining both anticipated and non-anticipated life changes together, ninety nine students decided on Access, due to a complex combination of contributory factors under the cultural umbrella of either 'change' or 'crisis'.

### **Tabular correlations**

In order to ascertain the fullest picture possible, there is need to draw up a 'cultural map' of the individual storylines of all of the one hundred and seventeen students, covering all factors and all categories identified in the 'beginnings', 'middles', 'ends' and 'new beginnings' of their structural, cultural, familial and biographical journeys, the 'Education Profiles', the 'Work Profiles' and the 'Personal Profiles'.

To this end Table 42(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f) constitute

that cultural map, in as readable and user friendly terms as possible. Basically, each contains a matrix of twenty students, (Table 42f seventeen) written numerically and vertically on the left hand side of the page, whilst across the top of each page numerically and in order of category appearance in the Profiles, are all categories. When a student has been identified in a given category, within the 'Education', 'Work', 'Personal Profiles' and 'New Beginnings' section, a cross is indicated along the student's own '**cultural story line**'. At the end of each student line is a total of how many categories they have been identified as experiencing within the tables, within the study. This is meant to provide further data, and ease of identification of the same, for 'would-be-course-plotters'.

On the final Table, 42f, there appears a total at the end of each category for the same purposes, to identify the number of student responses for each category. Due to the large number of students, one hundred and seventeen and the large number of categories identified, twenty six in all, sectioned into Education, Work, Personal Profiles and New Beginnings, at the top of each table, it would have been a messy process to name each separate category as they appeared on the tables, and thus for visional/physical clarity and user-friendliness, there is a key on page 352 providing a complete breakdown of all factors considered in the thesis.

FACTOR CODE FOR TABLE 42(a,b,c,d,e,f)

EDUCATION PROFILES

- A1 Reflections on teachers
- A2 Reflections on curriculum
- A3 Reflections on examinations
- B1 Parents pushing education
- B2 Parental pressure to leave school
- B3 Not taking education seriously
- B4 Regret not taking education seriously

WORK PROFILES

Negative work Experiences

- C1 Boredom at work
- C2 Not achieving true potential

Positive Work Experiences

- D1 Working with people
- D2 Job satisfaction derived

Reasons for Leaving

- E1 Redundancy
- E2 Birth of a child
- E3 Marriage

PERSONAL PROFILES

Anticipated life changes

- F1 Children started school
- F2 Children left school
- F3 Children left home
- F4 Living with someone
- F5 Moving house

Non-anticipated life changes

- G1 Broken Relationship
- G2 Redundancy
- G3 Illness
- G4 Death of a relative

NEW BEGINNINGS

- H1 New Beginnings
- H2 Wanting to work with people

Data collected 1992-94

### Category Codes

353

Table 42(b)

Data collected 1992-94

MATRIX SHOWING ALL STUDENTS WITH ALL CATEGORIES

Category Codes														Category Codes													
<-EDUCATION PROFILES->							<--- WORK PROFILES--->							<---PERSONAL PROFILES--->							<-NEW BEGINNINGS->		TOTAL STUDENT				
A1	A2	A3	B1	B2	B3	B4	C1	C2	D1	D2	E1	E2	E3	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	G1	G2	G3	G4	H1	H2	RESPONSE.		
Student																											
21									X		X	X		X						X						5	
22									X			X		X			X				X		X			7	
23	X	X						X			X								X	X						4	
24					X		X	X	X			X														5	
25								X				X		X												3	
26					X		X		X										X							4	
27									X											X			X			3	
28								X	X										X							3	
29							X	X		X						X										4	
30							X		X	X										X						4	
31							X																X	X		3	
32																										0	
33																							X			1	
34																				X						1	
35																							X			1	
36								X												X			X			3	
37																			X							1	
38														X												1	
39																			X	X			X			3	
40												X		X												2	

Table 42(c)

Data collected 1992-94

## MATRIX SHOWING ALL STUDENTS WITH ALL CATEGORIES

Category Codes														Category Codes													
<-EDUCATION PROFILES->								<--- WORK PROFILES--->							<---PERSONAL PROFILES--->							<-NEW BEGINNINGS->		TOTAL STUDENT			
A1	A2	A3	B1	B2	B3	B4		C1	C2	D1	D2	E1	E2	E3	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	G1	G2	G3	G4	H1	H2	RESPONSE.	
Student																											
41										X														X		2	
42										X					X											2	
43										X												X				2	
44								X		X														X		3	
45										X														X		2	
46			X			X																		X		3	
47															X											1	
48										X					X											2	
49										X																1	
50			X	X						X																3	
51																								X		1	
52			X							X					X											3	
53		X	X							X														X	X	5	
54			X																							1	
55																								X		1	
56		X				X				X	X													X	X	6	
57						X																				1	
58										X	X													X	X	4	
59		X				X				X												X				4	
60										X											X					2	



Table 42(d)

Data collected 1992-94

## MATRIX SHOWING ALL STUDENTS WITH ALL CATEGORIES

Category Codes														Category Codes															
<-EDUCATION PROFILES->								<--- WORK PROFILES--->								<---PERSONAL PROFILES--->								<-NEW BEGINNINGS->		TOTAL STUDENT			
A1	A2	A3	B1	B2	B3	B4		C1	C2	D1	D2	E1	E2	E3		F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	G1	G2	G3	G4		H1	H2	RESPONSE.	
Student																													
61					X	X																				X		3	
62									X	X																		2	
63									X	X				X		X										X		6	
64																X										X		2	
65			X					X	X	X																X		5	
66																												0	
67										X																		1	
68				X					X																	X		3	
69								X								X					X							3	
70			X							X						X										X		5	
71												X				X										X		3	
72									X													X				X	X	4	
73												X				X										X	X	5	
74									X								X						X			X	X	5	
75																												0	
76									X													X						2	
77											X															X	X	3	
78																												0	
79			X							X	X																	3	
80									X							X												2	

Table 42(e)

Data collected 1992-94

## MATRIX SHOWING ALL STUDENTS WITH ALL CATEGORIES

Category Codes														Category Codes														
<-EDUCATION PROFILES->								<--- WORK PROFILES--->							<---PERSONAL PROFILES--->								<-NEW BEGINNINGS->		TOTAL STUDENT			
A1	A2	A1	B1	B2	B3	B4		C1	C2	D1	D2	E1	E2	E3		F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	G1	G2	G3	G4		H1	H2	RESPONSE.
Student																												
81	X							X		X		X									X	X						6
82									X	X		X										X				X	X	6
83									X	X																		2
84	X												X													X		3
85					X			X	X	X																X		5
86								X		X																		2
87	X																									X	X	3
88																										X		1
89				X		X							X			X												5
90													X													X	X	3
91				X				X	X	X						X					X							6
92	X				X								X			X												4
93			X					X		X				X												X		5
94										X						X												2
95																		X								X		2
96																X										X		2
97																												0
98																X										X		2
99	X											X									X					X		4
100				X	X				X	X		X														X		6

Table 42(f)

Data collected 1992-94

## MATRIX SHOWING ALL STUDENTS WITH ALL CATEGORIES

Category Codes																	Category Codes												
<-EDUCATION PROFILES->								<--- WORK PROFILES--->							<---PERSONAL PROFILES--->								<-NEW BEGINNINGS->		TOTAL STUDENT				
A1	A2	A1	B1	B2	B3	B4		C1	C2	D1	D2	E1	E2	E3		F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	G1	G2	G3	G4		H1	H2	RESPONSE.	
Student																													
-----																													
101																										X		1	
-----																													
102										X				X		X						X				X	X		6
-----																													
103		X				X	X		X																	X		5	
-----																													
104			X			X																X						3	
-----																													
105																												0	
-----																													
106					X																X							2	
-----																													
107																												0	
-----																													
108																X												1	
-----																													
109										X																		1	
-----																													
110													X			X												3	
-----																													
111																												0	
-----																													
112																												0	
-----																													
113																												0	
-----																													
114																												0	
-----																													
115																										X		1	
-----																													
116																										X		2	
-----																													
117																										X		1	
-----																													
TOTAL																													
CATEGORY																													
RESPONSE																													
-----																													
10	9	9	5	3	9	12		22	4	25	45	6	8	14	3	25	4	4	1	3	21	21	6	4		26	37		

### Permutations and Interpretation

Careful scrutiny of the complete tables of all students and all categories reveals little in the way of permutations. Unlike Durkheim's end result, after gathering together the suicide 'facts', there is no 'integration' nor 'regulation' factors into which to categorise certain types. Indeed this comes as no surprise, since the common social denominator of the study has already been identified, the students' working class background. In the Durkheimian sense, their working 'classness', was their cultural regulation, was their cultural integration, both factors crumbling into a state of 'cultural and personal anomie', as crisis or/and change ensued.

In terms of specific patterns developing within the general social class background, there appears to be none, or at least none of any significance. The main 'statistical' reason for this is that there is little duplication of categories for each individual student. In other words, the research results were very individualistic and not confined to only a given number of students, a hard core of responses so-to-speak. In actual fact, it is patently clear from the tables that one hundred and twelve students out of a total of one hundred and seventeen made at least one contribution in at least one category in the research. Thus, the responses go across the board, with identifiable factors for the vast majority of the students and this in itself would negate the possibility of patterns or correlations, unless the category responses had been condensed

into a smaller group than that of the whole. Rather than being a negative finding, the fact that so many students made responses to given categories is an indication of the most important pattern overall the cultural base of the students, their social class. This has already broken down along clear gender lines in terms of anticipated life change as a total female response, and non-anticipated life change, crisis, reflecting the two thirds female and one third male overall breakdown of those on the course.

Regarding this last issue, I attempted to find if there was any correlation to be drawn between crisis and change, in terms of whether some students experienced factors from both categories (Table 43). An analysis of Table 43 reveals that eleven students experienced some combination of change and crisis situations. Of these combinations the most frequent was F1, 'Children Starting/Settled at School' and G1 'Broken Relationship', with seven students experiencing both situations. On a gender basis the breakdown of the seven is that they are all female. The second most frequent combination of crisis and change was F1, 'Children Settled at School' and G2, 'Redundancy', with three students experiencing both situations, once again all women. Obviously twelve is a very low number out of a possible total of one hundred and seventeen students and difficult therefore to draw too many concrete conclusions from the figures except the gender issue, the all

female numbers, which may suggest that working class women's lives are more prone to such combinations.

**Table 43**      Crisis and Change Combinations  
Data collected 1992-94

	Categories									
	---- Change ----					----- Crisis -----				
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	G1	G2	G3	G4	
<u>Student No.</u>										
<u>Gender</u>										
5F	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	-	-	
13F	X	-	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	
17F	X	-	-	-	-	X	X	-	-	
19F	X	-	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	
21F	X	-	-	-	-	-	X	-	-	
22F	X	-	-	-	-	X	-	-	X	
63F	X	-	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	
69F	X	-	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	
70F	X	-	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	
73F	X	-	-	-	-	-	X	-	-	
74F	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	X	-	
91F	-	X	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	
102F	X	-	-	-	-	-	X	-	-	
110F	X	-	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	

The crucial figure in respect of this argument is that of the fourteen who identified with crisis and change, thirteen are in fact changes due to the status of children, eleven in F1, 'Children Settled at School', one in F2, 'Children Left

School', one in F3, 'Children Left Home'. Any combinations of 'change-crisis' were in fact bound to be female, since no men identified any of the change categories in their 'Personal Profiles'. We know that many of the male students were thinking about change, the 'dreams' discussed in the 'Work Profiles' and from the interviews in the 'Affinities' Chapter, but within such situations life change was not an anticipated scenario, as is the case with women and anticipated changes in their domestic roles. Thus by definition of this gender distinction, since women are the ones who apparently experience anticipated life changes due to changes in the 'independence' status of children, they would by default, be the only ones who could also experience a non-anticipated life change, a crisis, over and above their anticipated life changes.

Clearly the figures highlight how working class women bear the brunt of the children of their school/home mores and thus have to choose their own moments of change after consideration of their familial obligations. By the same criterion it would appear that the biographical changes of their children, starting school, settled at school, etc., did not affect the biography of the working class men in terms of making decisions about joining Access.

A further source of interest in terms of pattern identification was to ascertain how many students had mentioned the enjoyment derived from 'Working with People', D1 in their 'Work Profiles'

and how many of the same went on to mention the issue in their 'Personal Profiles' under the category H2, 'Desire to Work with People in the Future'. Table 44 illustrates the investigation:

Table 44:

Students appearing in both categories 'Working with people' (D1) and 'Wanting to work with people in the future' (H2).

Data collected 1992-94

-----  
 7, 10, 11, 12, 27, 45, 53, 56, 62, 65, 70, 77, 82, 85, 91,  
 100, 102.  
 -----

Thus, only seventeen students in all mentioned the 'people factor' in both their 'Work Profiles' and 'Personal Profiles'. When one considers that forty four students identified D1, 'Working with People' and thirty nine identified with H2, 'Desire to Work with People', then one would have thought that the number who identified with both categories, thirteen, could have been expected to be somewhat higher.

Other permutations of pattern combinations from the total data of Table 42, produced no more significant figures than those three issues already identified. Some of the slightly higher statistics from these permutations produced the following, that seven students, identified with C1, 'Boredom' and with C3, 'Potential Not Being Realised', seven students identified with C1, 'Boredom' and H2, 'Desire to Work with People'. Clearly the figures are not substantial in terms of specific



patterns, although there are certainly some tendencies to be considered.

These tendencies, these patterns, need to be considered in relation of course to the major finding of the thesis, the most obvious pattern of all, that ninety nine of the students did experience a crisis or a change in their lives prior to joining Access and felt the need to mention this on their application form as a reason for wanting to do Access. Sixty two of the students experienced a non-anticipated change, a crisis before commencing Access and felt the need to mention this, on their application form as a reason for starting Access. Thirty seven of the students experienced an anticipated change in their life situation and felt the need to mention this on their application form as reason for starting Access. The figures also need to be considered in relation to where the students come from and where they are going, their working class position and their desire to enter university.

#### **Opportunity costs and personal anomie; the balance factor**

It could of course be argued that since many people experience crisis or change or combinations of the same in their lives and do not enrol on an Access Course then there is no real significance in those who experience the same and do enrol on an Access Course. Overriding such an argument of course is the unusually high numbers of students who experienced crisis or/and change situations and who completed applications to

undertake Access in crisis and change situations, ninety nine out of a total of one hundred and seventeen, sixty two 'crisis' and thirty seven, 'change. Even more significant in terms of the research findings is that they **actually mentioned this in their application form, which is crucial since it means that the information, voluntarily provided, means** something to them, it matters as part of the reason for Access. Further still, the fact that such a massive percentage of the students mentioned 'change' or 'crisis' in their lives needs to be contrasted with the very small number who did not. By any criteria, based on the information in the application forms, the majority of the students have had quite painful lives, according to their own testimonies, and quite a rough time of it and this affected their decision to undertake Access.

Clearly, the overwhelming evidence suggests, that the vast majority of the students were experiencing something that could best be described as a 'consciousness raising' experience in their life situation, a consciousness change which led them to want to alter the course of their lives in a very significant way. Working class people with the bare minimum of educational qualifications, with such an apathetic view of school life, do not willy nilly decide to go to university, a catalyst of change in lives and accompanying change in perception has clearly been at work. That catalyst is what the research has been attempting to uncover from the students' own statements of their life experience especially the important areas of school

life, work life, personal life and why Access at this point in their life.

The questions on the application form were honestly asked, and honestly and very openly answered by the students. The three areas of 'school', 'work' and 'personal life', are of course interconnected and reflect the structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors of the thesis title and are a reflection of the students' time and place, and socio-cultural position. The temporal interplay of these factors, discussed frequently in the research, was first played out before the Access students were born, creating for them their designated birth culture(s): social class, gender, etc. The overall social situation of the Access students suggests clearly that their birth culture(s), especially their working 'classness' were not advantageous to their expanding life situation when compared with that of middle class people. There was little possibility of gaining significant educational qualifications at school, significant enough to provide them with a place at university, but there again, this came as no surprise, since by the nature of their cultural base and expectations, it was never really a serious cultural consideration anyway. Hence the term 'cultural pragmatism'. Their working lives further cemented their assigned cultural track, expressed in their own words as something of a soul destroying situation. Dreams were kept alive, dreams of something better, more fulfilling, more satisfying, more creative, more people involvement, but never

realised due to the lack of educational qualifications and opportunity costs involved in attempting to realise the dream within the confines of their cultural base.

For many the opportunity for dramatic personal change only came when their life situation took on something of 'nightmare' proportions, when the reality they found themselves in, for the first time, greatly reduced the opportunity costs involved in realising dreams, as so often is the case, something good from something bad. The time was right to make the move, the opportunity costs painfully removed for many by redundancy, relationship breakdown, illness etc. Personal anomie may be a time of anguish for many but it is also a time when states of 'normlessness' can be turned into states of new directions, when involuntarily relieved of one's cultural continuity, stability and security one can seek pastures new. Times of great change affect societies and people alike, and until such dramatic change occurs we may say that the routinisation of everyday living produces a state of what could best be described as 'ignorance is bliss'. When the rude awakening comes, for many 'ignorance is bliss' moves to 'pain is learning', and such learning for working class people clearly serves as an awesome apprenticeship when compared to A levels, as the very different cultural preludes for university entrance, for people from very different cultural backgrounds.

### **Confidence levels; evidence of the balance factor**

Few working class people would risk the massive and unknown risks involved in attempting the move to university, unless given some changed circumstances in their lives prior to their decision. There clearly is something of a push pull factor at work, the push from cultural stability, the pull to cultural change. The cultural push must be significant, since there is a need to constantly remind ourselves that to working class people, having once tasted the middle class academia of school life, education in general, and university in particular, appear as something of a forbidden and very bitter fruit. Self confidence levels are already severely diminished, due to the painful experiences prior to Access, the marital breakdowns, the mental breakdowns, the general health breakdowns, the redundancies. Even for those experiencing anticipated life change, without crisis, those women who decide on Access due to 'settled children', the end of one lifestyle, full-time motherhood, in exchange for another, full-time student, must appear as an awesome transition, fraught with worries, lack of self-confidence and apprehension whether the move is the right one. Add to these pre-Access experiences, the thought of attempting to enter university, a degree, and confidence levels must surely come under even greater strain.

Working class students throughout their Access year suffer very substantial bouts of 'lack of confidence', and for the first few weeks of the Course, the year itself hangs in the 'cultural

balance' for many. The reason for emphasising the lack of confidence amongst students due to life changes before the Course, often dramatic and very painful, combined with fears of the education system itself, a cultural hangover from school days, is that however low the confidence ebb, the desire for change, must be stronger, proved by their application to do Access. Now having established that confidence levels are very low, self-esteem taking many cultural kicks, it is clear that the will to enter university via Access, to outweigh those personal fears, must be significant to say the least. In essence, the structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors affecting mature students' decisions to undertake an Open Access Course for possible entry to university, are at one and the same time, the catalyst for endings and the catalyst for new beginnings, the push - pull of 'elective affinity, the push - pull of changing cultural ideas.

### **Future Research Agenda**

#### **First Consideration: Weighting of Opportunity Costs**

Clearly any future research agenda would investigate further just how the decision to join Access is finally made through weighting the opportunity costs involved in such a decision. In particular, the whole issue of how people actually weigh up opportunity costs opens up a new project of depth interviews, in conjunction with further quantitative data, to discover the personal calculus that students go through before final decisions are made. At its most basic this would entail further

consideration of the 'balance factor' discussed earlier, in short what do **potential students weigh up against what** before becoming **actual students**? It may be that such considerations involve intense mental machinations weighing up present life commitments/needs against aspirations/dreams of significant life change. How they articulate this to themselves remains to be discussed in the process of investigating whether these calculation can be articulated and compared.

Second Consideration: 'Nothing to Lose' and 'Cultural Meltdown'

It may also be that due to the crisis situations that many students find themselves in prior to enrolling on Access they literally have '**nothing to lose**' in making their decision to join the course, the calculus being a weighting of present pain and personal anomie against a foreseeable future of healing and purpose (working with people being seen as a crucial factor in such perceptions.) Indeed it may be that with many experiencing severe anomic crisis prior to enrolment on Access that the '**nothing to lose**' factor in its extreme form can best be described as something approaching 'cultural meltdown', with significant personal change generating further significant personal change. A classic illustration of such a situation occurred with this year's student intake (1994-95) in the case of a middle-aged male student who wrote on his application form under his 'reasons for undertaking Access':-

I wish to do Access to get a better understanding of people and society. I also wish to further my education. My aim is to become a hospital social worker. I have often been told I have the personality for this and I really do consider myself

experienced with social problems and would now like the chance to help other people with similar problems.

**I hadn't had many problems in my life until 1987** then my mother had cancer. She died in 1990. My father was also ill with alzhiemer's disease. I had to give up work to look after him. I also got heavily into debt with gas, electric, etc. Eventually they were both cut off. I had my own flat at this time. My father died. My girlfriend left me and I went into a deep depression. I felt the world was against me and I had no idea of who or where to turn for help. I felt totally alone.

There isn't room to tell everything on this paper. also what happened to me is very personal. I would like to discuss it with you privately. From that very bad time in my life I do really think I can benefit other people. From what I've heard about **Open Access it sounds like a course I should have taken years ago, but unfortunately I hadn't heard about it.** [The stress is mine.]

Obviously the reason for quoting the student at length (and the need for anonymity) is clear, since although perhaps an extreme example of what life can bring and how 'cultural meltdown' can occur, his desire to enrol on Access and his reasons for doing so, encapsulate the core of the thesis and the need for further research in the area. Earlier in the thesis (page 41 ) we quoted Archer's insistence that any morphogenetic analysis must start ... 'with the ideas which at any given time have holders ... For only if an item is held by someone can its logical relationships with other items have any other effect on agency.' [Archer, 1992: xix.], Clearly, the student quoted above can be seen as holding deeply held ideas of a very personal and painful nature, themselves the unintended consequences of the biographical collapse of previously held ideas, relating to the student's birth culture, a working class male. (He was a painter and decorator whose thoughts on education emphasise very clearly the negativity



expressed by the other students in the study, ... 'To be honest I can't remember very much about school as I left in 1970.')

Thus the ideas he now holds are the product of rather dramatic life crises, in short the changes he experienced generated the changes in ideas. His case, although perhaps extreme, captures the quintessence of the thesis, people changing the ideas they previously held, due to changing circumstances in their cultural, familial and biographical life situation, Archer's morphogenetic bottom line ... 'In short, analysis opens by examining the effects of holding ideas with particular logical relations (of contradiction or complementarity to others) ... [Archer, 1992: xix.] This was the starting point for the thesis, providing the foundation for analysis of how the changes/crises experienced by the students promoted problematic situations which needed resolving and how the decision to join Access was a significant factor in their resolution. The formulation of new ideas, the desire to enter university, (my description of 'going against the cultural grain') indicates how cultural contradictions can become cultural complementarities and how (through moving from working class life due to changes and/or crises) cultural complementarities can become cultural contradictions. . Archer again:-

In brief, contradictions mould problem-ridden situations for actors which they must confront **if and when** they realize, or are made to acknowledge, that the proposition(s) they endorse is enmeshed in some inconsistency. What they do next is not determined: they have the options of irrational dogmatism or of abandoning the theory or belief altogether, **but** if they want to go on holding it non-dogmatically then their own only recourse

is to repair the inconsistency, that is the force of the situational logic. [Archer, 1992: xx.]

Thus, the changes/crises experienced by the students in their personal and work situations, (marital breakdown, redundancy, ill-health, familial changes, moving house, death of relative, etc.) seemed to promote **personal choices and cultural contradictions** (both in varying degrees and perhaps also relative to each other) resolved in the first instance by their decision to enrol on Access. In a sense they can be seen as simultaneously fulfilling the second and third of Archer's conditions for solving 'problem-ridden situations', since they can be seen as abandoning their working classness (**their belief**) by their decision to seek university entry, and by doing so attempting to **repair the personal inconsistency** of their lives. (though not attempting to repair that which generated change in the first place but perhaps attempting to modifying it). It would appear that by suggesting that Access students are simultaneously fulfilling two of Archer's directional responses to the situational logic of problem-ridden situations that they want the best of both worlds, to abandon and to repair) and on this point I would agree, for in essence Access students are in such a position, by the ensuing cross-cultural spheres they find themselves moving in. This will be discussed further in the conclusion on future research agendas, when considering the Fourth Consideration: 'The Ripple Effect'.

However, the simultaneity of their response does not digress from Archer's original choices of action since the students are not attempting to repair that which generated change in the first place, (after redundancy seeking further factory work rather than Access, after marital breakdown seeking a new marriage rather than Access, with the children starting school staying at home with further emphasis on the housewife role and less on the mother role, rather than Access) but rather attempting modification rather than reparation, a balancing act to be sure, (fraught with potential problems in the future) but a considered and reasoned decision based on their present dilemma(s) and therefore not constituting in any way the first of Archer's options, 'irrational dogmatism', illustrated admirably by the case of the student above who in the face of great personal adversity and pain made rational and very reasonable decisions, attempting to turn something bad into something good, disadvantage to advantage; a cathartic and catalytic response to his painful anomic state. Thus, further research into the notion of 'cultural meltdown' may reveal that even in its more extreme states, the 'meltdown' is not addressed by personal sealant but by personal release, 'melt-up' if you like. To quote Laing on not too dissimilar occurrences in the field of mental illness, 'Madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be break-through. It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death'. [Laing, 1990: 110.]

One corollary to the tragedy of the student's tragic life story to date, not only his example of being aa classic example of what Archer calls ... 'the quintessential reflective ability of human beings to fight back' but also his spirit and sense of humour which is hard to convey through secondary testimony. He was always an amenable student on the course with a great sense of humour, but his humour was no means unique but the 'crisis hallmark' of many Access students. Many psychologists may suggest that such an approach to pain and strife is mere escapism, a pathological response to trauma, but I do not feel humour to be an individual, pathological escapism but rather a culturally interactive pragmatism based on their working class foundations. As Beynon says of the Ford production workers:-

. The new meritocratic education system ( still powerful in its biases against working class children) legitimized 'success' while making the judgement of 'failure' more total ... Yet listening to these people talk, hearing them argue and discuss (swear even!), it was hard to escape the realization that in these 'failures' something had been denied. For as they coped with the line, with late buses, with the rain and the lay-off, they managed to take life for what it was while adding a bit more to it - through humour and jest, sometimes pathos. [Beynon, 1984: 21.]

Now taking Archer's belief in 'the quintessential reflective ability of human beings to fight back' and Beynon's testimony to the resilience and humour of working class 'failures', I was reminded of the words of Paul Robeson, **a voice of and for the culturally disdvantaged**. On the sleeve notes for an album of Robeson's performance at the Royal Albert Hall, August 10th, 1958, his son Paul Robeson, Jr. writes:-

The concert with a particularly inspired rendition of 'Old Man River' - the famous song from "Show Boat" that Paul Robeson made into a world-wide battle cry by changing the original lyrics from "I get weary and sick of tryin'. I'm tired of livin' and scared of dyin'," to "I keep laughin' instead of cryin'. I must keep fightin' until I'm dyin.'" [Robeson, 1971:] (The stress is mine.)

Of course although human beings have the ability ... 'to fight back against their conditioning ... giving them the capacity to respond with originality to their present context' [Archer, 1992: xxiv.] (as in Robeson's case) we must not forget that life/social problems and the situational logics faced and resolved one way or another by individuals or groups are not operating within a social vacuum but affect and are affected by the individual's or group's cultural base, their degree of advantage or disadvantage in society, which in turn affects what they are able to do about problem-ridden situations. Archer argues that:-

... the nature of Socio-Cultural relations affects which of the responses forged under the pressure of the situational logic can actually be made to stick ... no corrective formula (generated to repair contradictions) and no reproductive scheme (elaborated to protect complementarities) can be made to 'take' in society when the contemporaneous distribution of interests and power do not gel with it. [Archer, 1992: xxi.]

In short conditions for resolving problem-ridden situations, through different situational logics, are not governed solely by the individual or group deciding on this course of action or that course of action, but are dependent on the structural and cultural environment under which both problems and situational logics occur and decisions to deal with them are made or are allowed to be made. (After all 'the quintessential reflective

ability of human beings to fight back' means there is something to fight against, in many instances other human beings intent on protecting what they have.) The necessary social gel may be that the right conditions prevail, the 'right conditions' in Weberian terms being the combination of the 'right idea', the 'right person' and the 'right time', 'elective affinity'. This would appear to be a (perhaps the) crucial element in determining whether potential Access students become actual Access students, which brings us on to a the third consideration for future research options.

#### Third Consideration: Affinity Combinations/Compatibility

Any future research agenda, related to the issue of opportunity costs, the pros and cons of personal change, must by definition incorporate the structural, cultural and familial push/pull factors under which the pros and cons are sorted out, in short further investigation within a morphogenetic framework of Weber's concept of 'elective affinity'. The notion of the right idea being available for the right people at the right time, has been a running theme of the thesis and one I think that has much farther to run. One possible starting point (and there are I think many) for such a venture could be to contrast the social poles of morphogenetic (biographical change) and morphostatic (biographical stability) cycles with the Weberian concept of 'elective affinities' by preparing a continuum of sorts based on biographical change or stability.

Thus, if we take 'the right idea, the right person and the right time' as one polar extreme of the continuum, then it may be possible to develop the spectrum of either personal change/stability to its fullest extent by graded permutations based on Weber's original concept. For example, saying that all things are structurally, culturally and biographically right for the person to take the personal plunge (right idea, right person, right time) we could go one rung down the ladder and postulate that it may be the right idea, it may be the right person but it may be the wrong time for them to decide on personal change. Methodologically this would have a reasonable fit with people who find the idea of Access attractive, who are indeed the right people in terms of compatibility with the idea but cannot make the transition from one life to another due to the timing of the situation, or more specifically to their own time. (In the case of a working class woman perhaps due to children not being settled at school).

A further permutation may involve the right person, the right time but with the right idea missing from the change scenario. An illustration of such a case was discussed in Chapter Three, with two working class women in their late forties who may well have been in a much better position to undertake Access some twenty years earlier than they did, having to leave the course after several months due to financial problems. Thus the 'idea' of Access was not available to them during the time of their 'ideal' compatibility with such desired change in the nineteen

sixties and by the time of enrolment in 1992 their lives were too problematic to take advantage of their Access programme.

Having briefly considered two permutations of possible 'affinity', the right person and the right idea but not the right time and the right person, the right time but not the right idea, we could consider the other possibility, **the right idea, the right time but not the right person**. Using a further example from further education, I have known of mature students who enrol on a certain course of study, believing it to be what they want, only to leave after a week or so, when they find it is not what they wanted at all. This might have as much to do with marketing problems as it does with the student's aims and the incompatibility between the two getting confused due to inadequate course details, either on printed literature or/and through poor course interview procedures.

Clearly, the three permutations and examples of 'affinities' considered above are only a very basic introduction to any further research agenda but do I think lay some foundations for consideration of times of personal morphogenesis or morphostasis throughout people's lives and the combinations of right idea, right time and right person are important to **whether change occurs and what change occurs**. Linking this approach to our earlier discussion regarding Archer's 'extreme types' and Weber's 'ideal types', the former 'existing in reality' and the latter as a methodological technique to gauge



subjective meaning behind apparently objective actions, we are back again to the title of the thesis, 'structural, cultural familial and biographical factors and the interplay between them affecting mature students' decisions to join an Access Course for possible entry to university'. In its broadest sense, since the thesis ultimately deals with structure and agency and the interplay between them, we are really seeking to discover the 'structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors affecting people's decision-making', as was emphasised in the Introduction.

Within the study we have looked at groups of people who found 'affinities' with Access due to change and/or crisis situations in their lives and have seen a significant shift in the ideas they hold, moving from one cultural base to the attractions of another. We could therefore argue that their combinations of affinities acted as an inducement to join Access but for further research it would be useful to look at people who may have wanted to undertake some significant personal change in their lives, due to change already occurring (as with the majority of the Access students), but who were unable to make the final decision due to inadequate affinity combinations. As such they may hold latent ideas of change (as many of the Access students did), suppressed, subdued or merely shelved pending the right circumstances, pending the right affinity for them to be realised, for the journey to commence.

To this end the three proposed future research agendas are highly compatible: the first would entail an in-depth analysis of how the opportunity costs are weighted and finally realised before potential students become actual students: the second, the possibility of 'nothing to lose' and 'cultural meltdown' scenarios; the third, how **combinations of 'affinities'** may **either induce or subdue** the potential and possibility of personal change and the calculus of opportunity costs involved in such decision-making processes. The fourth future research agenda broadens the scenario to consider the further effects of change not only on the individual directly experiencing the situation but also the effects on those in close social contact with them.

Fourth Consideration: The 'Ripple Effect' and 'Social Fallout'  
'Journeys', whether of the physical or mental kind, can affect not only the traveller but also the family and friends of the traveller, the people they 'leave behind'. When the journey involves unfamiliar territory, such as a working class person seeking university entrance, then the effects on social acquaintances can be even more traumatic and long lasting than a physical separation. The move from one cultural way of life to another, from working class life to middle class life for instance, can mean that the individual traveller culturally transcends their nearest and dearest leading to an unenviable anomic state for the traveller still hovering between this cultural group and that cultural group. Some thoughts on the

issue from Bryan Maddock, previously referred to in Chapter Seven, during the discussion on 'elective affinity'. In this extract Maddock, a British Rail labourer turned mature university student, reflects on the problems of cross cultural movement:-

Although I retain a sense of affinity with the social group of which I am traditionally a part, it is no longer reciprocal. When I meet any of my old workmates it is not uncommon for two disturbing things to happen. Sometimes, they are uncomfortably suspicious of me, and act in a curious defensive way. And I often realise with sudden embarrassment how arrogant and overbearing I must sound to them. For me it is no longer simply a matter of wondering what a middle aged graduate is going to do with his newly acquired education. That was a question which was always predictable.

Now, I find myself speculating on which particular section of society I might feel comfortable with. For if I am no longer 'one of the lads,' I'm hardly a middle class intellectual either. Am I, after four years at university, marooned in a kind of social no-man's land from which there is no escape. [Maddock, The Guardian, September 5th, 1986]

Earlier in the thesis I referred to the cultural knock-on effect when an individual radically changes their life and their cultural base, as the '**ripple effect**', so significant are the ensuing waves across their own life course, and the lives of those closest to them. The affects of change on one life can affect the lives of countless others since one individual experiencing change, can send ripples with decreasing intensity (depending on the closeness of each relationship) as they spread across the social milieux of partners, family, friends and others.

Of course the degree of personal change will also have an affect on the intensity of the 'ripples' from the onset and this may be the 'stuff' of social life anyway, since change is occurring continually, is a constant socio-cultural hallmark of most people's lives. The interesting agenda for further research (and to keep it manageable) would be to identify **significant biographical change/crises in relation to wider structural, cultural and familial properties**, (the core of the present thesis) and **trace the ripple effects of them on the lives of other people not actually experiencing the change but rather the 'social fallout' from the change**. In other words journeys may beget journeys and personal morphogenesis begets further personal morphogenesis with obvious implications of change for cultural groupings and even structural properties; the double morphogenesis of both structure and agency via socio-interactive ripples, themselves a product of structural and cultural waters.

### **'It's a Wonderful Life'**

Frank Capra, the American film director of the 1940s, said something very similar in his 1946 film, 'It's a Wonderful Life', which film critic Jeanine Basinger believes has ... transcended passing success to become a permanent statement of life'. [Basinger; 1986: 371.]

The film focuses on the life of 'George Bailey', ... 'the Everyman from the small town ... whose dreams of escape and

adventure have been quashed by family obligations and civic duty' [Basinger, 1986: 371.] and also by his conflict with 'malevolent capitalism' [Maland, 141:1980] in the form of 'Henry Potter', determined to expand his socio-economic power base to gain total control of the town and its inhabitants. Only Bailey stands in his way and the ensuing conflict, coupled with his other agential obligations (family commitments, etc.), presents a vivid portrayal of the tensions and stresses between structure and agency, of feeling 'both free and enchained, capable of shaping our own future and yet confronted by towering, seemingly impersonal, constraints ... the problem of structure and agency ... the most pressing social problem of the human social condition'. [Archer, 1992: x.]

Time, in relation to change, is also an issue in the film, encompassing very clear connotations of the relationship between past, present and future; beginnings, middles and ends; film critic, David Maland:-

(The) narrative can be segmented into ten major parts, each one treating a particular time in George's life. Parts one, eight and ten are in the present ... Parts two through seven constitute an extended flashback (the past) lasting more than half of the film ... and the ninth part is the fantasy sequence (the future) ... each major part of the film (is) distinguished by an action (right person), a changed location (right idea), a changed time (right time) or a combination of the three. [Maland, 1980: 136.] (The bracketed interjections are mine.)

During the closing frames of the film, George, despairing of the struggle and on the verge of suicide, is (through divine intervention in the form of Clarence Odbody AS2, 'Angel Second

Class') given the gift of seeing what society would have been like without him, and is horrified to see the consequences of 'him never being born' has on the lives of the people he knew in the course of his real life. He is told that ... 'each man's life touches so many other lives and when he isn't around he leaves an awful hole ... ' [Basinger, 1986: 302.] If this is true of one person's life, how true it must be of history, (of structural, cultural, familial and biographical morphogenetic interplay) and what an 'awful hole' it must make if we fail to incorporate it into our sociological study of society and individuality. One can also add the comments of film critic Robin Wood, in his assessment of 'It's a Wonderful Life', which seem purpose written to describe the morphogenetic relationship between structure and agency. Wood writes that the film ... 'at once transcends its director and would be inconceivable without him'. [Maland, 152: 1989.] (The emphasis is mine.) One could say the same about the individual's relationship to society and to history and the interplay between the three, the social trinity.

### **Morphogenetic journeys**

The morphogenesis of the students' lives has I believe been very clear to see in the pool of information derived from their Access application forms, the research interviews, the discussions and written accounts during Access. However, although sustained as one part of the hypothesis, the personal morphogenesis of the Access students', as stated in the

introduction to the thesis, was not the core of the research, but was utilised to explore the morphogenetic properties of structural and cultural interplay through biographical story lines, in a given society. That it is clearly applicable to familial or biographical properties within structural and cultural frameworks, thus bridging macro and micro divides, further supports the considerable strengths of the morphogenetic approach.

It was stated in the introduction that 'the true vehicle of the thesis is 'the interplay between structural, cultural, familial and biographical factors affecting people's decisions', and that the people aboard this particular vehicle on this particular journey were one hundred and seventeen 'mature students' wanting to 'undertake an Open Access course for possible entry to university' (Page.3), then the journey has come to an end, or at least this part of it, and thankfully time to let the passengers disembark from this research trail. The driver of this sometimes confused but searching vehicle can only thank them for letting him join them on part of their journey for a time, and hope that they feel that their openness and humanity, experienced in this study, has to some small degree, provided some truth about the journey that they have so far travelled.

**'I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.'**

(W.B. Yeats, from 'Aedh wishes for the Cloths of Heaven'.)

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